

EIN HARGLWYDDES SEREN Y MÔR OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA LLANDUDNO

35 LLOYD STREET. LL30 2YA

SUNDAY 9 AUGUST 2009

**may we know Christ more clearly
love him more dearly
and follow him more nearly**

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Dear Parishioner,

Today they would have described him as having learning difficulties. His real problem was that he couldn't handle abstract thinking; with regard to practical things he was OK. So when it came to Latin, he was a non-starter, or, as the racing Irish might say, an "also ran". And just everything else was against him as well: he was poor, there was a war on, and, deserting the army by accident, he got himself into deep trouble. But one thing was absolutely consistent in his life: he wanted desperately to be a priest. And, despite all the odds, he became not only a priest, but the patron saint of priests. I am speaking, of course, of St John Vianney, otherwise known as the Cure of Ars, whose feast it was last Tuesday.

The feast of the patron saint of priests takes on a special relevance this year, since this year has been declared by the Holy Father as the Year of the Priest, the one hundred and fiftieth an-

niversary of St John Vianney's birth.

For forty one years he was Parish Priest of Ars, near Lyons, in the south of France. And what an impression this simple man made!

He was first and foremost a man of prayer, spending long hours before the Blessed Sacrament. Those who saw him spoke of his "transfigured gaze". His utter conviction that Christ is really there in the Eucharist as our Friend and Brother was the source of all his strength, spiritual success and joy. "There is just nothing greater than the Eucharist" he used to say. And bringing others to share that conviction was his burning and constant desire.

He couldn't spend anything like as much time as he would have liked before the Blessed Sacrament because there were other duties calling. His holiness of life, deriving from his devotion to

Christ in the Eucharist, drew thousands upon thousands of people to him for spiritual advice. The man who could hardly put two ideas together in his theological studies drew people of ever degree of learning to him, from the simplest to the most learned and educated. He spent hours in the confessional; so much so that Pope John Paul called him a true "Martyr of the Confessional". He would spend as many as seventeen hours a day hearing confessions; and it is estimated that in his last year of life as many as one hundred thousand people went to him to confess. But John saw things the other way round: "It is not the sinner who returns to God to ask forgiveness", he used to say, "it is God who runs after the sinner and makes him return to Him"

Also flowing from his acute awareness of Christ in the Eucharist, the Cure of Ars felt a great impulse to serve the people for whom Christ had died and among whom Christ lives in the tabernacle. His life displayed an

intense devotion to the poor and the sick. Thus, on no less than three separate occasions, Pope John Paul affirmed that "the Cure of Ars remains for all countries a model of priesthood without equal, both of the realization of the ministry as well as of the minister himself".

Minister and ministry; individual priest and priesthood—we have to make the distinction between them. The Catholic Priesthood is a vocation which no human being could ever fully live up to. Perhaps not even the Cure of Ars! It is too sublime. It is nothing less than the Priesthood of Christ Himself, possessed by a feeble human being!

Like the Cure of Ars, and in this alone I can compare myself, I have always had an immense respect for the office of Catholic Priest, and always wanted to be one, from my earliest years. In preparing for Priesthood I could never believe that it would ever really happen to me. As an ordained priest for forty-three years, I still have to pinch myself

sometimes to realise that it has indeed happened to me. I feel exactly the same about priesthood today as I did when I was eighteen; only more so.

So, while the CV of priesthood has not changed one iota in these forty-three years, attitudes to it have shifted dramatically. Once it was considered a privilege one could hardly dare aspire to; now the young people don't even consider priesthood as a possibility. Attitudes have changed, of course, because our society has changed; the old values no longer prevail, materialism now holds sway. Let a more spiritual mindset prevail and vocations to the priesthood will once again flourish.

Actually, that is not quite true. There is no lack of vocations to the priesthood today. The Lord continues to put out the call as much as ever he did; it is our inability to hear it that is making the difference. It is just too noisy a business we are engaged in, making money to pay our

way. We all need to be far more prayerful; we all need to take a leaf out of the Cure of Ars' book and relearn the art of quiet and prolonged prayer.

So what I propose is that we mark the Year of the Priest by devoting our Wednesday holy hour to praying for the well-being of our priests and for an increase in the take-up of the Lord's invitation. Usually a dozen or so gather at eight o'clock and seat themselves on the sanctuary around the exposed Blessed Sacrament. Half of the hour is taken up with the recitation of the Rosary, the other half in silent prayer. Those who come love it, finding it very relaxing after a long day's work. As I said earlier, the Cure of Ars' love for the Blessed Sacrament was legendary. With such a weekly Holy Hour we would be following wisely in his footsteps.

God bless you, Fr Antony Jones