

The Curé d’Ars – Relevant for Today?

(Less we be accused of plagiarism, we freely admit that this article has been almost wholly drawn from Henri Ghéon’s work, *The Secret of the Curé d’Ars*, which we thoroughly recommend to all our readers as excellent spiritual reading. *The Editor, Apropos*.) This article first appeared in *Apropos* No 28. It has been posted on the *Apropos* website www.apropos.org.uk.

At the end of the *Year for Priests* in 2010, the Holy See apparently performed a *volte face* when it overturned a previously announced decision to make the Curé d’Ars, St Jean-Marie Vianney, a patron saint for all priests: hitherto he had been the patron saint of parish priests only. According to a Vatican spokesman the decision had been taken because the Curé d’Ars ‘*did not seem sufficiently representative of the priesthood in the 21st century, nor sufficiently universal.*’ Paradoxically, the Curé d’Ars would have agreed with this sentiment, such was his humility. But then he would have similarly agreed had they said the same about his position vis a vis 19th century parish priests.

Whether a priest of one era can ever be representative of another depends upon whether one judges him in relation to the age in which he lived or to his attributes as a priest – attributes which transcend eras. To assess this, one must consider the true role or duties of a priest.

The Catholic Dictionary advises us that;

‘It is the office of a priest, according to the Pontifical, “to offer, bless, rule, preach and baptise.” First, he is empowered to offer that sacrifice of the Mass which is the centre of all the Church’s worship, because in it Christ, the great high priest, continually offers Himself in a bloodless manner, and applies that one sacrifice consummated for our redemption on the cross. Next the priest, standing between God and his fellowman, blesses the people in God’s name. It is his duty, if a flock is entrusted to him, to rule and to instruct it, and to administer the Sacraments...’

The Curé d’Ars fulfilled his role, his duties, in an exemplary manner, despite the natural impediments which stood in his way. He may have lacked the intellectual capacity of many of his fellow priests, and indeed many of our contemporaries, but his supernatural gifts were immense. His vocation, its seedbed and his life have a message for all Catholics lay or clerical.

Good example and family prayer

Henri Ghéon¹ in his small but beautiful biography of the saint gives us a broad outline of the background which shaped this saint’s life. He was brought up in rural France where, at the end of the 18th century, traditional beliefs were kept intact. Jean-Marie’s grandfather thought nothing of giving tramps a bed placing ‘*human prudence far below the teaching of the gospel – according to which a poor man, any poor man, is the living image of Christ.*’ St Benedict Joseph Labre, the verminous “*poor man*” *par excellence*, who spent half his life tramping, the other half on his knees,’ was one of those who called at the Vianney house and was given Christian hospitality by our saint’s grandfather. When St Benedict Joseph left, he blessed the children, one of whom was Matthew the father of our saint, Jean Marie Vianney. The Vianney household was one in which evening prayers were said in common and the home atmosphere was such, as Ghéon puts it, that ‘*how Jesus was born and how the corn grows – one was no more matter for astonishment than the other.*’ ‘*Virtue*’, he tells us, ‘*passes easily from the hearts of mothers into the hearts of children,*’ thus emphasising the critical importance of a mother’s role in imparting the faith and virtue to her children.

¹ *The Secret of the Curé d’Ars*, by Henri Ghéon, published by Sheed and Ward 1946. Translated by F.J. Sheed. All quotations other than that from *The Catholic Dictionary* are from this work.

The sacrificing priest

Young Jean-Marie was brought up in the era of revolutionary France where many priests, rather than face expulsion or death, were prepared to take the oath of allegiance to the revolutionary Republic. These 'oath takers' were for the most part, states Ghéon, *'more law abiding than devotional'*. The non-oath-takers said Mass in secret *'since the priest was risking the scaffold and his congregation the galleys.'* These were no ordinary Masses: *'It was the same sacrifice, but at its highest value, since the gift of the Blood of God bore with it the gift of oneself.'*

This commitment of priests to their role no matter what the danger taught the young Vianney that a priest was *'a man who accepts death in order to remain one.'*

The shepherd catechist

Young Jean-Marie was a shepherd boy and his duties provided him with *'silence, solitude, leisure – all that one needs as food of the soul'*. In what Ghéon describes as *'those more human times'* shepherd boys would often have a stocking in their satchels to knit – an experience certainly far removed from that of the *homo xboxii* of this age whose life is consumed with noise, flashing images and no time for prayer. The revolution had left many without priests and uncatechised – a situation not terribly unlike our own. But the little Vianney in his play and prayer was even a source of catechesis for his non-practising neighbours: *'He modelled little statues of the saints, particularly Our Lady, in clay. He installed her statue in the hollow of an old willow trunk, adorned it with wild flowers and said his Rosary before it.'* This attracted his non-practising neighbours who had been without the Mass for three years. *'Who was the nice little woman in clay?'*, they asked, and he catechised them by imparting to them the truth he loved, and which he had learned from his mother. He led these neighbours in procession around the fields *'for it had come into his head to carry the statue of Our Lady about the fields behind a rough wooden cross.'* In another land, in another age, he might well have been a little Francisco of Fatima, but his vocation was not to be a seer, but rather a simple parish priest winning countless souls for God.

Too stupid to be a priest?

The young Vianney learned to read at the age of eight, made his first confession at ten and his first Communion at thirteen in a chateau with *'the shutters closed'* to keep out the prying eyes of revolutionary spies. He was a hard working labourer in his father's fields and prepared thereby for the years of intense hardship which were to follow from his vocation. At the age of nineteen he presented himself, practically illiterate, to the parish priest at Ecully with a view to following his vocation. He found learning extremely difficult and resorted to means he would later use to great effect: mortification of the flesh, works of mercy and, *'He prayed with every drop of prayer that was in his heart. He watched till it made him ill. But his mind got no brighter and he very nearly gave up.'* He then went on a solitary pilgrimage, of sixty to seventy miles on foot, to the shrine of St Francis Regis where he begged that saint's intercession which was granted: *'He learned, he understood; he grew to realise that he was not as stupid as he had thought.'* Alas this problem resolved, he faced another, he was called up to serve in the Napoleonic army. In short, he deserted, and remained 'on the run' for two years. One of his friends was to say of this incident: *'Whether because of his own good faith, whether he was persuaded that there had been a supernatural intervention, he had never believed that his conscience was chargeable.'*

A Disastrous Seminarian

The parish priest at Ecully, the saintly Monsieur Balley, took him back to prepare him for the seminary at Verrières. His level of studies at the seminary was low and his knowledge even lower. He was older than his teacher and was laughed at which pleased rather than dismayed him. However, *'He prayed as excellently as he worked badly'*. At the seminary at Lyons to which he was transferred he failed: *'What could anybody do with a would-be priest, so thoroughly recalcitrant in the matter of Latin?'* Fr Balley took him back again and sent him as a candidate for minor orders. He failed to impress the examiners and then did slightly better at a further examination. His fate then lay with the Archbishop of Lyons, Cardinal Fesch. The Cardinal had been called away so it was left to his Vicar General to decide upon Jean-Marie's fate. The Vicar General was concerned more about the piety of the student than his intellectual prowess. Fr Balley vouched for his piety. *"Good" said the Vicar General. "The grace of God will do the rest."* What a prophecy that turned out

to be! And made in so different a spirit from that of some seminary professors today who, according to some, regard piety as a reason for disqualification of aspiring priests. Ordained a priest at Grenoble, he was nevertheless denied the faculties of confessor since *'he was so backward in moral theology.'* He spent three years as a curate at Ecully under the tutelage of Fr Balley whose own practice of mortification and penance was an example to Fr Jean-Marie. The simple people of Ecully it is said recognised Fr Vianney's attributes before the learned did.

Ars – His mission begins

After arriving at Ars he was struck by the dilapidated state of the Church compared with the parish house and he sought to remedy this by embellishing the house of God while living frugally in his own. He systematically visited his parishioners and found the state of faith as dilapidated as that of the Church.

The Ars he entered as a parish priest was not altogether lacking in analogy to the state of the post-conciliar church: people were soaked in ignorance and had forgotten to believe, few men attended Sunday Mass, there was a grossness of manners, duties abandoned, drinking to excess, pursuit of impure enjoyment. He was not prepared to accept this. As Ghéon reminds us: *A saint is never broad-minded. A saint never compromises. Tender of conscience for himself, he is equally tender for others. He does not think that the word "indulgence" covers everything, for sin is sin. Others speak of it; he sees it – sees it almost physically, as a devouring leprosy, as the first spark of everlasting fire.'*

The reality of Hell

He then proceeded to teach the gospel of fear but *'without anger, without fear, his voice and his eyes full of tears.'* He taught them the reality of Hell and he taught them too his responsibility for their fate: *'Hell exists. I beg you: think of Hell. Do you think that your Curé will let you be cast into hell to burn there forever and ever! Are you going to cause this suffering to your Curé?'* He preached with even more vigour the following week but as Ghéon relates:

'No one thought of smiling, for he was in tears; he was crushed like the sinner under the maledictions that he was uttering. "When the end of the world comes," he went on, "each parishioner will meet his pastor and Our Lord Jesus Christ will say 'Pastor curse them!'" "What Lord am I to curse the children that I have baptised to you?" "I tell you, Pastor, curse them!" "I Lord, curse the children whom I have taught for you, to whom I have given your Holy Body, to whom I have distributed the Bread of your Word?" The pastor will say what he has done for them. Our Lord Jesus Christ will reply: "Pastor, they did not listen to you enough; curse them. I command you, curse them." Ah my brethren, what grief for a pastor! You do not believe me? Yet it will be; yes it will be.'

Ghéon observes understatedly: *'We may be tempted to find this religion too hard.'* How much more so in our age when it seems that neither pastor nor flock appear to believe in Hell and where broadmindedness and indulgence are the prevailing sentiments in both pulpit and pew. Have we not seen some in a congregation snigger and smile when a priest dares to echo even milder warnings to his flock? Our own experience might tell us that if the priest asks too much his flock will simply leave and, as Ghéon says, the priest *'will take a less lofty tone and will preach salvation – on easier terms'*. That however was not a temptation to which the Curé d'Ars succumbed.

Convert my parish

The Curé d'Ars did not leave his flock in a state of fear. He held out to them the reward of a life of virtue. *'We shall see God,'* he cried *'as though lost in ecstasy, he kept on saying over a space of several minutes "We shall see Him!" "We shall see Him"',* and told them how that was possible through prayer, penance and perseverance. This says Ghéon *'is religion pure and simple, religion for itself – that is for God. Truly this is a hard saying. The Jews thought so and said so long ago. It is the Word, that which by its very definition contradicts. Through it a lukewarm parish was recalled to fervour, brought back on to the plane of eternal and supernatural destiny – and that almost overnight.'*

He did this not by preaching alone, but through constant prayer and fasting – the tools needed to drive the Devil from his parish. He pled before the tabernacle each morning that God would convert his parish and punished himself by scourge and sleep deprivation so that his suffering might attain that conversion. ‘My God, I consent to suffer all that you might wish for all my life ...for a hundred years... and the most bitter suffering, but convert them...,’ he cried.

The Mass

In an era where the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass has been the subject of great abuse; abuse sufficient to warrant papal apologies, we need to regain that sense of the sacred which came naturally to saints like the Curé d’Ars. We quote Ghéon who describes perfectly the scene in the parish church at Ars:

‘At dawn he said his mass, slowly, almost always with tears, sometimes with a great smile, as though he were addressing the angels gathered about the altar – his own guardian angel of the parish, the guardian angels of all in his congregation. Joy or suffering? He no longer knew. They are so closely intermingled in the Chalice, that the joy of a friend of God resembles suffering, his suffering resembles joy.’

At the priest’s Communion, one witness recalls, “He remained as though in ecstasy for as much as five minutes”... He was seen to look at the Host, “sometimes in tears, sometimes with a smile”.

The Abbé Monnin tells us that the Curé D’Ars ‘was so deeply moved by the Real Presence, that he could scarcely breathe or speak.’ How different is this from the treatment of the Blessed Sacrament in many of our parishes: where the Real Presence appears to register little on the consciousness of the congregations, where the priest is afforded greater respect than Our Divine Lord.

Do only what one can offer to God

This holy priest established confraternities for his flock, a confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament for men, of the Rosary for girls, and he gave his flock a simple rule in contradiction of that adage of the worldly who claim that it is too difficult to save one’s soul: ‘Keep the commandments of God and the Church, and avoid the seven deadly sins²; or to put it another way, do good and avoid evil: ...Here is a good rule of conduct. Do only what one can offer to God.’

Adornment of God’s house

He spared little in his adornment of the church. While his abode and dress were of the poorest, the church was adorned in the finest. He opened chapels for the Blessed Virgin, St John the Baptist and his dear little friend, St Philomena. He bought pictures and statues of the saints, St Joseph, St Peter, St Sixtus, St Blaise, St Michael the Archangel, St Francis of Assisi and St Benedict Joseph Labre. He also installed an *Ecce Homo*. He did so so that the saints should be living realities to his flock. His choice of paintings and statuary were all in good taste. It had its results: people visited the sanctuary more often and more willingly – a message perhaps for clerics who have statues removed from the sanctuary. How many little children today are deprived thereby of the opportunity to see week in or week out the image of their Blessed Mother and her Divine Son and God’s Holy saints?

A puritan?

Yet, it is perhaps in his attitude to dance that some see the saint as almost puritan in outlook. We hear little if any criticism of dance today from our pulpits and yet there is little doubt that the music, dress and dance of today are designed to excite base desires in wills weakened by drink and drugs. Henri Ghéon recalls that for the saints, ‘sin has a smell’. Are we to gainsay the saint’s nose for the sins arising in his parish from this activity? Is the Curé d’Ars’ warning altogether out of place in our time regarding the ‘dance’ venues of today? - ‘Christians who go into a dance room leave their guardian angel at the door, and it is the devil who takes his place, so that very soon there are as many devils as dancers in the room.’ We do not think that the Curé d’Ars was opposed to dancing per se as to dancing of a particular type and of its effects on souls.

² Anger, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony

He paid no little price for his opposition to such dancing. He was accused of immorality and subjected to a campaign of hostility and obscenity. He merely scourged himself all the more that his accusers may thereby be converted.

The Orphanage – La Providence

One of his great loves was the little school he opened for girls which was in the charge of three women. It was quickly filled by locals and boarders from neighbouring villages. It had to be enlarged and sustained and for this he begged from the rich and from heaven. Two miracles at *La Providence* give witness to our saint's account in Heaven. With a grain loft empty and sixty girls to feed, and with his existing donors exhausted, the Curé had considered sending the girls away. Nevertheless he went into the loft gathered the few grains left into a heap and hid the relic of St Francis Regis under it and asked the community to pray. A few hours later he asked the cook to get the remains of the corn. She could scarcely open the door to the loft which was full to the roof with grain. On another occasion several years later during the great drought of 1834 there was only enough flour left for three loaves. The Curé instructed the baker to put yeast into the little flour she had and to act tomorrow as though everything was as usual. The next day the dough swelled and thickened so much so that the trough was as full as though a full sackful had been placed in it – enough to make ten huge loaves weighing 20-23 pounds each. All that the Curé had to say was: *'The good God is good indeed. He takes care of His poor.'* God, however, was to test the poor Curé, with no little test when *La Providence* was taken from him. It was his last refuge, it was there that he fled *'to breathe a purer air'* away from the sins in the confessional, it was there that he catechised, where he was fed and had his clothes mended. It was handed over to an order of Sisters. It was then says Ghéon *'the one attachment remaining in his heart to a thing here on earth; and God broke it suddenly, ruthlessly, leaving his servant only the pulpit, the confessional and the altar.'*

A killing schedule

The Curé d'Ars worked a schedule for the care of souls that would have killed many. Here in brief outline was his approximate daily timetable:

0100 hours - Prayers in church then confessions;
 0600 hours - Mass then thanksgiving, and service to the faithful.
 0800 hours - ½ glass of milk - no bread - at *La Providence*.
 0830 hours - Sacristy - confessions
 1000 hours - Little Hours of the Office then confessions again
 1100 hours - *La Providence* - catechism
 1200 hours - The *Angelus* - then lunch at the presbytery eaten standing up;
 1230 hours - visits to the sick then return to church for Vespers and Compline;
 Confessions - women
 1700 hours Confessions - men
 2000 hours Evening prayers and the Rosary
 Matins
 Lauds
 2200 hours Confessions - sometimes till midnight;

The Curé d'Ars worked around 20 hours per day, three quarters of which at least were in the confessional. He was, it is said, chained to the confessional the bonds of which were never broken till his death.

The Confessional

We cannot hope to better this description of both confessor and penitent by Henri Ghéon. It is worthy of reflection time and time again by both priest and layman and we do not apologise for quoting it at length:

'At midnight he[the Curé d'Ars] rose, and taking his lantern went downstairs...He made his way into the Church went down on his knees and asked God to bless the day that was beginning. He lit one or two tapers, himself sounded the Angelus, opened the door for pilgrims, and took his place in the confessional in the chapel

of St John the Baptist. A soul lay open before him. All that seems to us simple enough, but for him each time it was a drama, a test, a cross.'

The Confessor

'That secret place where even angels do not enter – the place not only of actions but of thoughts and the obscure medley of motives – opened its door so that he, a stranger, became a confidant. This stranger, this confidant, was no longer a man like other men, a man curious, amused, possibly indiscreet: he was the representative of God on earth; for the ear that listens and transmits only to God what it hears is truly the ear of God. The mouth that replies, guides, consoles, binds and looses is truly the mouth of God. The Curé d'Ars was that ear and that mouth. **And he knew it.**'

'He knew it as all priests know it, but more clearly. Confessions, rapid and numerous as they were, were never to him mere pieces of routine. He never allowed the consciousness of his task as a priest to be out of his mind for an instant. Every time, he listened as God, he replied as God – with much trembling, for he was only a humble servant, but in the possession of all the resources that God can give and in the certainty that Christ lived in him.'

The Penitent

'The soul which came to lay itself bare before him did not always come very willingly. If it were afraid he gave it confidence. If it made pretences, he stripped it bare. If it gave only half its secret, he opened it wide; in himself he was a living argument that no one could resist. That men might show themselves just as they were, **he** showed himself just as **he** was, in all his boundless love for God; to the soul that lay open before him, he opened his own soul, and showed the love of God that was in it. If it was empty he filled it. If it had begun to thirst for God, he quickened its thirst. And if it felt no thirst, he showed it the stream of God's Grace welling in his own soul.'

'But what a spectacle he had before him of barrenness, of obstinacy, of indifference. The moment when the door opened, and the curtain was about to be raised, was for him always a new moment of anguish – for it always meant a new revelation of the wretchedness of the creature who will not love God enough.'

'Such a one was only ignorant, he would instruct him: darkened in conscience, he would enlighten him: lukewarm, he would inflame him: indolent, he would stir him to a new life: slothful, he would awaken him: inconstant, he would fix his mind; cowardly or feeble, he would revitalise him; he would break through the crust that so often overgrows souls, bring consolation where there was misery, bring reminder of sin where there was happiness without reason. And where a soul had lost touch with God, he knew how to remake contact.'

'Who would not be almost overcome with giddiness, standing on the edge of those abysses that life digs in the souls of men? But as has been said, "he clung tight to the hand of his Mother, the Church"; he leaned for support on the rock of her teaching: he depended on the breath of the Spirit Who inspired Her, and Who could at every moment inspire him. And the more he realised how immeasurable was his own weakness, the stronger he felt, for he knew then that it was all in the hands of God.'

The Confessor's sharing in Christ's suffering

'Strength and suffering went together. The power that he borrowed from God was linked up intimately with suffering in his own person. Christ on the Cross took upon himself all the sins of mankind. It was for his servant to take that share of suffering which belonged to the sins of those who confessed to him – his share of the spitting, the blows, the insults, the wounds. All through the day and often into the night, enclosed in his wooden prison, he bore men's burdens, and he pardoned their sins. Yet his mind remained clear, for he knew also how to direct.'

Not Absolution alone

'To absolve a soul is not everything. The priest must also be able to give advice, sometimes heroic, sometimes more prudently weighed, which will enable the soul not only to avoid the sins to which it is more particularly

tempted, but to swim against the stream as high as its own nature, aided by Grace of God, is capable of going: and each soul, if it is to attain to the best that is in it, must have individual treatment.'

Reading hearts

The Curé d'Ars was an excellent confessor. He could read the hearts of men great or small and he could read their hearts to one end only – that they attain Heaven. Of this there are many examples – The occasion when the Curé broke off hearing confessions to go into the crowd to tell a girl in a state of mortal sin, about to leave without the opportunity of confession, that he would hear her confession; the robber whose withheld sins the saint enumerated before the sinner; the freethinker induced to confess after confrontation by the Curé.

He also exercised the gifts he had been granted to comfort troubled souls. One salutary example which perhaps ought to be recalled, in the case of tragic suicides, is that of his meeting with a lady greatly concerned about the soul of her husband who had drowned himself. Before she could say a word the saint said: *'Do not worry. Between the bridge and the water your husband repented, and made an act of contrition. Pray for him'*. What great compassion!

Saving Souls above all

The saint's devotion to St Michael and the angels was well known. We have already noted how it was suggested that he communed with them during the Sacrifice of the Mass, but perhaps they also afforded him a degree of consolation in his suffering when he must have sensed their rejoicing in Heaven when he turned many a sinner towards God. Ghéon reminds us that men on the other hand are so constituted that they find greater joy in a man being physically cured than by a soul surrendering to grace. We recently had the spectacle of the 33 Chilean miners saved from the bowels of the earth – a feat of great human ingenuity, aided by countless prayers, but while the Curé d'Ars would undoubtedly have felt compassion for their plight, he would have been primarily concerned about their souls. He worked miracles with souls in mind. Like his Divine Master he cured the sick either on his own behalf or through the intercession of St Philomena *'his lady, betrothed, sister - and even later his daughter, for whereas he grew old, she remained fixed in the spring of her youth.'* It was to her that he attributed cures. But he valued the cure of souls above all else.

Opponents natural

This poor priest not only faced the strains of the burdens he imposed upon himself. Others would add to them. Other diocesan priests out of jealousy of his success in harvesting souls, some from their parishes, petitioned against him. He signed the petition against himself such was his humility. He also faced opposition from those persons, mostly 'pious' women, who sought but failed to have his endorsement of their own high opinion of themselves. He also bore bravely for eight years a bossy curate who considered that *'holiness must bow before intelligence'* – his own. But a greater opponent was to test him in subtle and not so subtle ways.

Opponents spiritual

Such was the tremendous success of the saint in attracting penitents from all over France, that his enemy, Satan could not refrain from attacking him. He suffered 35 years of assault. The aim was not only to disturb his work but also to destroy the soul of a saint. As Ghéon points out: the Devil and his legions make use of a saint's virtues rather than his vices in their attempts, but when these fail they tear the mask off so that they might terrorise and harass their victim. This enemy which the sainted curé called *The Grappin* assaulted the saint relentlessly. The enemy infested his dwelling making noises through the night, like a rat, or hammering his door with mighty blows, moving chairs, prancing like a horse with ringing hooves, dragged him from his bed, cradled him with obscene sighs or set his bed alight. Nor was this merely a figment of the saint's imagination: there were countless witnesses to his persecution. Eventually the Curé recognised that the intensity of an attack increased with the immensity of the sins about to be confessed by a sinner. But the toll of these attacks was not without effect as the saint was denied the very little sleep he could grab. The Curé, ever since he was a little boy, had loved solitude and it was upon this love that the Devil would almost defeat the saint. The Curé began to have doubts about his own soul – doubts placed by the Devil in his mind, doubts which suggested that he ought to pursue a life of greater holiness. To this end the Curé applied to the Bishop to leave Ars. He was offered another parish but

preferred to enter the cloisters of the Trappists or Carthusians. He left to do so but turned back at the cross at Les Combes when he asked himself if he was doing God's will by fleeing. This temptation towards the contemplative life would return again following his cure from pleuro-pneumonia. He would leave Ars again only to return from Notre Dame de Beaumont saying 'God does not want me here. Let us go back to Ars.'

The Devil's near triumph

The saint's desire for solitude, a virtue, was the device Satan used on several occasions to try to trap him. In 1848 he decided to escape Ars to join the Marists and to do so before the new Bishop could stop him. He wrote a letter to the Bishop to be delivered after his departure, giving as his reason his state of infirmity. His plans however were leaked and he was besieged and beseeched by penitents and his curate to remain. The saint saw in this the will of God and later commented that his actions had been that of a child. M. Ghéon suggests that during this latter attempt the saint was led astray by Satan: '*For the devil had managed to slide into his conscience the monstrous sophism that a priest of the Church can obey God while disobeying the Church...Never in M. Vianney's life was the fiend's occult influence so clearly shown; never was it so near to a great triumph.*' This was his worst temptation because 'it had worn the disguise of the love of God.'

Supporters spiritual

As we have said elsewhere, the Curé had a great devotion to the saints and especially to The Blessed Virgin Mary and St Philomena. Our Lady appeared to him, '*a lady of middle height, clad in a robe of dazzling white, sown with golden roses. Her shoes white as snow. Her hands gleamed with the richest diamonds. Her brow circled with a crown of stars shining like the sun.*' She conversed with him and was seen by others. The lady of his little clay statues had appeared in person. As for St Philomena, Henri Ghéon conjectures that the Curé chose her among all the other saints because she was a perfect example of his ideal of obscurity. She had remained unknown for 1700 years until hundreds of miracles testified to her sanctity. She was his '*dear little saint*', his '*counsel*', and she wrought miracles for him.

Solicitous unto death

Towards the end of his life when he was all but a wraith, when life was clinging to him, he still continued to spend 16-17 hours in the confessional. Until his death he continued to instil, in pilgrims and flock, through his example and tears, the love of God. He then went to meet his Divine Lord whom he had served so faithfully.

Whether St Jean Marie Vianney ultimately becomes a saint for all priests is a matter for the Pope or the Holy See. There is no doubt however that he had particular attributes which must be inculcated into every priest:

A spirit of humility;
 A love of chastity;
 A spirit of sacrifice;
 A love and reverence for the Holy Mass and Blessed Sacrament;
 A love of and devotion to Our Lady and the saints;
 A hatred of evil;
 A great compassion for sinners and a great love for souls;
 Obedience to the will of God. **ASF**

Prayer for Holy Priests

My dear Jesus, Thou desirest that we pray to the Lord of the harvest that He send zealous labourers into His harvest. Deign to raise up in Thy Church, and especially in our dioceses, numerous and holy priests who, taking Thy Divine Heart as their model, will, in the exercise of their Holy priesthood, promote the glory of Thy heavenly Father and the salvation of those souls whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy Precious Blood. Give us truly holy priests who, inflamed with the fire of Thy divine love, seek nothing but Thy greater glory and the salvation of souls.

O Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the clergy, pray for us; obtain for us a number of holy priests.

St Jean-Marie Vianney, patron saint of parish priests, pray for us.