

❧ A MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR ❧

A Heart Untouched by Time

Dear Friends,

Perhaps the most astoundingly fruitful pastorate in the history of the Church was carried out in the obscure village of Ars in southeastern France by **Saint John-Marie Baptiste Vianney** (1786 - 1859) now known all over the world as the **Curé** (or Parish Priest) of Ars. He is the patron saint of priests.

I am excited and grateful that when our church reopens in four weeks' time and is consecrated by the Bishop, it will feature prominently a **statue of St. John Vianney which was custom-made for St. Catherine's**. The statue was hand carved in northern Italy, and the woodcarver used a photograph of St. John Vianney in death (there are no photographs of him alive, because he would not allow them) to fashion the face, which is a very good likeness of him.

In the statue, St. John Vianney is vested in the familiar cassock and surplice of a priest, and he is wearing a violet stole. This recalls his truly heroic ministry in the confessional, in which he heard confessions for at least 12, sometimes up to 16 or 18 hours a day. The right hand of St. John Vianney, in the statue, is raised in blessing, and the left hand gestures toward the tabernacle which will contain Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

When his body was exhumed from its tomb in preparation for his beatification in 1905, it was found that his body was incorrupt: that is, his earthly remains were preserved from the usual process of decomposition, presumably miraculously. As was the custom at the time, the heart was removed from the body, and placed in a separate reliquary. There it remains to this day. As you can see in the photograph, the heart today has become somewhat brownish and leathery in appearance, but it's in pretty good shape for someone who died in 1859!

Ordinarily the heart is kept in a separate chapel on the grounds of St. John Vianney's parish at Ars, but on occasion it has left there and gone to different parts of the world. Through the generosity of the Cardinal Archbishop of Lyons, France, the heart of St. John Vianney recently has been transported to the United States and, for a few months, is making its way around our country, under the aegis of the Knights of Columbus. The heart has already made its way to several cathedrals and national shrines.

In my view, this tour of Vianney's heart could not come at a better time, in the midst of the scandals which have caused everyone such anguish. St. John Vianney remains for the whole Church the absolute model of what a shepherd of souls should be.

On April 28, Divine Mercy Sunday, the heart will be at the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and on May 1, it will be at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston. Between those stops, though...

I am delighted to announce that, on April 29 and 30, 2019, the relic of the intact heart of St. John Vianney, Curé of Ars and patron saint of priests, will be coming HERE to St. Catherine of Siena Parish!



This is a singular honor for our parish and for our diocese, and I am certain it will be the occasion of many graces and blessings for us all.

We are planning some very special events in conjunction with the visit of the heart of the Saint:

- A celebratory Mass at 7:00 p.m. on April 29, which is our patronal feast day, the Solemnity of St. Catherine of Siena, followed by veneration of the relic;
- An all-night vigil of prayer in church, in the presence of the heart of St. John Vianney, with readings from his sermons on each hour;
- A Mass on the morning of April 30 for students from SCSS and other local schools.

With the Dedication of the Church on March 24, and the heart of St. John Vianney visiting in April - not to mention our first Holy Week and Easter in our new sanctuary - this will be quite a Spring at St. Catherine's!

More specifics will be published in the bulletin and announced at Mass as this event gets closer.

So... mark your calendar and save the date!

God bless you!

Father Marcello