



The Parish of Saint Anthony Glen Huntly

74 Grange Road, Glen Huntly VIC 3163

☎ Telephone: (03) 9401 6336

✉ glenhuntly@cam.org.au

www.cam.org.au/glenhuntly

ABN: 70548 570 366

Homily at Mass 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C – 4 August 2019

A brief account of the life of St John Vianney is included in today's Parish Bulletin. Today is his feast day – and priests have a more than special bond with him for not only was he a hardworking and long serving Parish Priest in the little town of Ars outside Lyons in France, but he is also the patron saint of the diocesan clergy – all priests who work in parishes, doing what we see our priests do: celebrate Mass each day, especially Sunday: ministering the Sacraments especially Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick; helping people in their needs: visiting families in their homes, and interacting with children and young people, including our school children. It all seems fairly straight forward, but there could not be a better way of life, nor a more rewarding vocation!

St Paul's encouragement to "look for the things that are in heaven" reminds me of one story from the life of St John Vianney. One day the bishop and vicar general of Lyons called him into the diocesan offices. He wasn't in trouble. Rather they asked him to become Parish Priest of a tiny out of the way village called Ars. The French Revolution had wreaked havoc all over France: the guillotine had disposed of the king and queen, aristocrats and political leaders, as well as many bishops, priests and religious. In many places the churches and schools had been shut for decades: no priest, no Mass, no parish life, no school education for the young.

Ars had been hit hard. So much so that the bishop said to Fr Vianney: "You will find little love for God there". Nonetheless off he went, walking along the road from Lyons to Ars. He reached a cross road outside the village, but the signs pointing to Ars had been broken off. It happened that a young boy came up behind him and asked the priest where he was going. "I'm going to Ars – but which direction is it?" "Don't worry", the boy said, "that's where I'm going. I'll take you there. Walk with me". "Take me to Ars", Fr Vianney said to the boy, "and I'll take you to Heaven".

On his first Sunday in Ars Fr Vianney opened the church, rang the bell, and put on his vestments for Mass. After he genuflected and kissed the altar he turned round – there was not one person in the church. After Mass he walked around the village – there were people in Ars but they weren't in the church for Mass – they were all in the pub! Sometime later a sign went up outside the pub: "For Sale". Fr Vianney bought it. Then another sign went up on the pub wall "Closed".

It was then that he could begin his work in earnest. Every morning he prayed: "My God, convert my parish!" And through him the Lord worked. Fr Vianney made himself available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation for hours on end; he preached, he taught children and adults. Ars soon became not only a model parish, it also became a centre of pilgrimage.

People came from all over France to participate at Mass devoutly celebrated, to hear Fr Vianney's clear and direct preaching, to go to Confession. One man who had been to Ars said: "I went to Ars to see a man, but found God".

This is St John Vianney's own thoughts on who and what a priest really is:

*"O how great is the priest!
If he realized that he is he would die ...
God obeys him:
He utters few words and the Lord descends from Heaven at his voice,
to be contained within a small host.
Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders,
we would not have the Lord.
Who put him in the tabernacle? The priest.
Who welcomed your soul at the beginning of life? The priest
Who feeds your soul and gives it strength for the journey? The priest.
Who will prepare it to appear before God,
bathing it one last time in the blood of Jesus Christ?
The priest – always the priest.
And if the soul should happen to die
(as a result of sin) who will raise it up,
Who will restore its calm and peace? Again the priest.
After God, the priest is everything.
Only in Heaven will he fully realize what he is."*