

- Standing sentinel back above the confessional is the statue of St. John Vianney. He stands there because of his renown as a confessor – often spending 16 hours/day in the confessional of his parish in Ars, France.
- It's ironic that Vianney is the patron saint of parish priests, as he struggled mightily to become a priest in the first place. 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.
- St. John of Vianney was a man of great wisdom, a man who understood so acutely how the Christian must learn to turn away from all worldliness to love and serve God.
- As St. John once said: "You cannot please both God and the world at the same time. They are utterly opposed to each other in their thoughts, their desires, and their actions."
- Our 2nd reading today also reminds us that we should turn aside from worldly ways. As St. Paul puts it, we: "must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds."
- Rather, he says: "you should put away the old self of your former way of life, . . . and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth."
- In other words, as Christians, our lives must necessarily be different from the lives of those who do not know God. Our belief in Jesus has set us apart, and therefore our lives must reflect our belief in Jesus and in His teachings.
- Furthermore, in the Gospel of John today Jesus tells the crowd: "Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."
- Jesus is calling us to make a choice. While in a primary sense Jesus is making a reference to the Eucharist, in a broader sense our Lord is calling us to choose the things of Heaven over the things of this world.
- Therefore, my friends, it's important that we understand that we cannot compromise with the world and still maintain our Christian integrity. Our Christian values and the values of the world are too often at odds. And so we have to make a choice.
- Are we going to live up to the name of Christian given to us at baptism by actually trying to be like Christ, following Him no matter what the cost? Or are we going to wantonly revel in the mammon this world has to offer, imbibing its culture of death and all its trappings?
- Are we going to live in way that is pleasing to God, or are we only concerned with pleasing ourselves? Are we willing to compromise with the world to get what we want in life or to make our lives easier, or are we willing to suffer for our integrity?

- Of course, western society is getting more and more hostile to us Christians. Just look at the parody that was made of our Catholic Faith at the opening ceremonies of the Olympics with the mockery of Leonardo DaVinci's *Last Supper* – which was essentially a mocking of the Holy Eucharist at its Institution!
- Understand what the worldly elite are saying to us. They are telling us Christians that we don't have a place in this world, that our Faith is something worthless and ridiculous.
- And it's not just that our Christian faith is being mocked. The difficulty is that the deadly, deceitful, and ugly agenda of the world is being foisted and forced upon us: in our companies, in our schools and universities, and especially through the media.
- There's an assault on our Christian Faith being waged in almost every corner of our culture. And living up to the demands of our faith is becoming all the more difficult because it requires fighting a culture that has become almost completely inimical to our Faith.
- Truly, living as a faithful follower of Christ requires courage, self-control, patience, humility, and a willingness to suffer – virtues that are hard to come by in our world today.
- Already, some of you are finding that being faithful to Christ and His Church is requiring you to make very difficult decisions about work, education, and health care.
- But this is nothing new for Christians. In many times and in many places, the Church's children have been harassed, punished, and even martyred for our Faith. That's both our history and our future. It's our patrimony and our privilege.
- Yet let us not forget that following Christ is also the way to true joy and peace in our lives! Jesus tells us today: "whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst." In Him alone is our peace and our eternal happiness.
- While we may have to endure struggle and adversity in this life, our Lord has promised us an eternity of joy if we can remain faithful to Him now in midst of this life's uncertainties.
- And what we learn from our first reading today is that God provides for His chosen ones, especially amid suffering. God knows for what we hunger, He knows our hearts. And He never leaves us bereft of His grace, even when we grumble against Him.
- Look at the Israelites in the first reading today. Even after God has delivered them from Egypt with mighty signs and wonders, they still complain. Yet God provides for them nonetheless.
- And that's because our Lord is not put off by our sinfulness. While He abhors our sins and wants us to turn away from sin, our sins do not harden our Lord's heart against us. To the contrary, our sins only deepen His compassion for us.
- Knowing of His compassion should dispose us all the more to humbly acknowledge our faults and ask for His forgiveness when we sin. For truly, His mercy is always available to the humble and contrite of heart.
- Brothers and sisters, we are living in difficult and divisive times. And judging from the political and cultural landscape in which we live, there are going to be many crosses that we Christians will be obliged to carry.
- Yet, as St. Vianney once said: "I tell you that you have less to suffer in following the cross than in serving the world and its pleasures."
- So, be of strong heart and good cheer, for God always provides for His children, sinners though we are. It's in times like these that the Church produces saints.
- While the way that God marks out for us is so often the way of the Cross, follow it nonetheless. You'll never regret doing what you know is right in the eyes of God.

- St. John Vianney, pray for us.