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## **Conference 5 | St. John Vianney, a Steward**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Take Lord and receive all my memory, my understanding and my entire will. All I have and possess. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. All is yours. Do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. This is enough for me. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

So friends in Christ we come to our last conference concerning the saints and the virtues and the theme that we have of St Paul's letter to the Corinthians, first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 1 – Be an imitator of me in as much as I am an imitator of Jesus Christ. And so we look at particular virtues in the lives of the saints and see how it is that they inspire us to want to be better disciples, to be better people, to really be leaven within our society and be that light of Christ that we are all called to be especially called to be on the day of our baptism.

And so the special saint I want to look at today is St John Vianney. And so St John Vianney is the patron saint of priests. And he was born in the year 1786 and he lived until 1859. So he's lived a good, long life but early on he lived in a very, very difficult time in the life of the Church in France. France being the eldest daughter of the Church. The church was persecuted, monasteries were taken away, churches were shut down. We know that we have the goddess Reason was enshrined at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and you know many, many clergy and religious lost their life because of their faith. So it was a very, very difficult time in the Church. And so this is the life, or the world that St John Vianney grew up in. And this was the life eventually he became such a great saint.

So I want to invite you to listen to these words that come from the Gospel of St John. 'When they had finished breakfast Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John do you love me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." The second time He said to him, "Simon, son of John do you love me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John do you love me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." "Truly, truly I say to you, when you were young you girded yourself and walked where you would go. But when you are old you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." This He said to show by what death he was to glorify God. And after this He said to him, "Follow Me."'

So as I gave you those little timeframe of his life – late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century for St John Vianney in France. And St John Vianney wasn't the best of students so he had some difficulties before him. Even to the point where he almost wasn't ordained. But, praise God, he had a good monsignor in his court who really pled his cause and he because he struggled in one particular way, he struggled in the study of latin. That was what was holding him back. This was back in the day when everything was in latin. You had to study in latin. All your tests, everything would have been in latin. And so you can imagine if that was a big struggle for you how difficult that would be. But this monsignor knew and understood that this man had a call, similar to the good bishop in Oklahoma City with Blessed Stanley Rother. He had a good man in his court as well. And so he he helped to advance him forward in order ultimately to be ordained a priest. Praise God. He was able to be ordained



a priest. And the ironic thing about all of it is here is a man who almost wasn't ordained a priest. But here is a man who now is the patron saint for all priests. So he is a real shining example for anyone who has ever been called to the altar of the Lord. Many different things that took place in his life but I think that when we look at the life of St John Vianney I'd say the one virtue that really shines forth is the virtue of generosity. Virtue of generosity. He gave of himself. He truly was a spiritual father and he gave of himself to the people who were entrusted to his care. And we'll look at a few examples of how I see that having played out in the life of St John Vianney.

First of all, remember that this was a very, very difficult time in the life of the Church in France. And so in this tiny, tiny little town, its outside of Leon. Its still a very, very small place. This tiny little town. The bishop sent St John Vianney there to be the parish priest. And he said to him this – He said, "There is not much love for God in the heart of the people there. Its going to be your duty to place it in their heart." What a task! I think that any time a bishop assigns a priest to a parish that's his intent. But I don't know if we actually say something like that. But there's not, the people don't love God there. Its going to be your job to help them to come to know and to love God. So what a what a difficult task. And I think that's really first where we're able to see the virtue of generosity with St John Vianney. He could have said, "Well I don't feel like I'm up to the task." But he simply out of obedience he simply said yes. And he went to this tiny little village of Ars in order to place in the hearts of the people a love for God. And how was he going to do that? Ultimately he was going to do that by not leading people to himself but really leading people to Jesus Christ. Right, because Christ is the way, the truth and the life. Christ is the one that came into the world so that we might have life and have it to the full. And by no other name, Acts 4:12, do we come to know salvation but under the name of Jesus Christ. So in any efforts that we have to evangelize, to catechize, to really spread the good news it means that we must lead people to Christ and His church. Anywhere else is essentially a dead end. And we see that in the life of of John Vianney, St John Vianney. Generosity. Generosity.

There's a story about when he was first when he first went to the village. And he was travelling there and he became lost. And it was in the evening. And he came upon a young boy. And he asked the young boy, "Can you tell me the way to Ars?" And the young boy said, "Ars is over there." And he said to him, "Thank you. You've shown me the way to Ars; now I'm going to show you the way to heaven." There's a beautiful statue that depicts this this event that took place at that very spot. I think that what isn't isn't that beautiful? To say, "You've shown me to Ars; I'm going to show you the way to heaven." Again, to evangelize, to catechize, to to not draw to himself but rather to to introduce and lead him to Jesus Christ and his church so that he can be an active member in his own faith. And that was that's one of the ways he was placing the love in the hearts of the people for God by doing doing something like that. And I think that's one of the stories that really stands out to me a lot about St John Vianney. And this is one of the reasons to if we think about what a steward is. A steward is something that really manages things. Right, watches over things. He doesn't necessarily own the things. And we talk about stewardship in the life of the Church. **And really at the heart of stewardship is this – that all that I have, all that I am, all that I am able to do is a gift to me from God. Its not something I initiated on my own but gift to me from God. And so to be a good steward of those gifts to use those gifts to place them at the service of God and at the service of my neighbor.** And I think with those words of St John Vianney saying, "You show me the way to Ars I'll show you the way to heaven" he was really being a good steward. He was understanding that first of all this young boy was a gift entrusted to him and because he was entrusted to him he was he was called to lead him closer to the Lord. I think in the life of parents that's one of the best ways to see your child. Your child or children are gifts to you from God. They've been entrusted to you. And what better way to love them or what better way to be a



good steward with them than to lead them closer to God? To a deeper and intimate relationship with the living Christ. And that's one of the ways that we can say, "Well I'm going to show you the way to heaven." So I think that's a good way of showing generosity in our own lives as well.

As St John Vianney arrived at this parish. He arrived and this very date, late, probably close to the middle of the night. And I'm sure he his mind was just racing, because he had all this time to to travel there. His mind was racing about all the things that he wanted to do or could do and when we think about today we might go to a parish or might go to a new job or move to a new town we can have all these things that are racing through our mind. And what St John Vianney did though was he he chose the better portion to borrow a line from the lips of our Lord in relationship to Martha and Mary. What he did was he went to the little church, a tiny little church, it was kind of delapidated and unkept and things like that and he simply set everything up. And he set it up for Mass in the morning. He understood that was the best thing that he can do. And we should always remember that, too. **The most important thing we can do as Catholics is to enter into the celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass.** Because in the Mass what we do is we gain a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. Within the Mass what we do what happens to us is we are inserted into the paschal mystery. Right, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in an unbloody way. **And in the Mass what we do is we have a guaranteed encounter with the living Christ.** Remember in the assembly in the Church's minister in the Word but the Eucharist par excellence. And so he understood that was the most important thing that he could do. So the next morning he rang the bell and he called people to the church. And as the story goes there were a few very, very devout people that had been waiting for this moment. Right, and they came to Mass. You can just imagine how excited they were. And there was also people that came that just wanted to say, "Ok, let's check out the new guy. Let's see how long this guy's going to last." So some people came simply out of curiosity. But being generous as he was and doing precisely what the scriptures, what Our Lord called Simon Peter to do, he was feeding the sheep. He was breaking open the word to them and he was feeding them with the bread of life. And remember Jesus said, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has my very own life within him." Right and so that's what St John Vianney was doing. He knew that this was what he was called to do – feed them with the bread of life. And he was generous in doing so.

Speaking of generosity with his time. He was known to have stayed in the confessional for up to 18 hours a time. Now I'm glad that we have this little shot here in my chapel. This is a window that was done by a lady who doesn't live too far from here. A lady in my diocese. And its an image of St John Vianney. And if you can see in the image of St John Vianney, I'll just move this over a little bit. You have here him sitting in his confessional. I've had the opportunity to see that confessional. And then you have here on the other side kind of a faceless penitent. Somebody going to confession to him. And then you have all these people, different types of people from all walks of life coming to confession to St John Vianney. He was known to sit in the confessional for up to 18 hours a day. And he was given a special gift and the gift that he was given was to be able to read someone's soul. The gift he was given was not for his benefit, but it was for the benefit of the penitent in order to be able to help to help them to confess their sins and to lift their burden. So that having received absolution when they walked away they could be as clean as the day as they were on the day of their baptism. And so St John Vianney would sit in the confessional. Generosity. Right, generous with his time. And and avail the people of of their sins through the sacrament of penance, reconciliation, confession; different words that we call it. The same reality. It's the sacrament of God's mercy.



Another great little story I remember about St John Vianney that always inspires me. It's kind of somewhat funny. Is that you know St John Vianney didn't have 100%, as great as he was and such a saintly man, he didn't have 100% support from the town. And why should we think anything of that we should experience something like that because Our Lord didn't have 100%. And so there were a group of ladies in the town that didn't that didn't like him. And they wanted him to leave. And they would see the good saint, they would see him walking through the streets and they would say, "Hello, father." And they'd say, "Could you pray for a special intention that we have?" And he being the good spiritual father, he being the good priest that he was he would simply say, "Yes ladies, I'll take your your intention. I'll take it to the altar of the Lord." And this was something that that went on a number of times and it didn't come out until after his death in the year 1859 that the intention that the ladies were asking him to pray for, their own private intention, was that he would leave. But he was being a good, generous father. He simply said, "Yes, yes, ok, I'll go ahead and and take that intention." And I would think that over a period of time as he kept receiving that intention from the ladies that act of charity, that act of generosity started to soften the hearts of these these women and you would hope that their appreciation of him but even more so their faith in Christ and in His Church was was enkindled. Would start to expand. Would start to grow in their life. And so I think when we look at in terms of our own generosity we want to make sure that we are generous, generous, too. Generous with God. Right, and being generous with God doesn't simply mean we say, "Ok Lord, I'm going to give You one hour a week on Sunday and the rest of the time is mine." **But being generous with God means he has to come first so I plan my week around the Lord.** I plan my week around my obviously Sunday obligation is a is a given. I plan my week around my daily prayer. I plan my week my week around visits to the Blessed Sacrament to that guaranteed encounter with Christ in the Eucharist. **So I plan my week around the Lord and then after that then I start to fit everything else in.** And how would we do that plan – God would come first, everybody else is going to come second and then I am I am going to come third. It really is that's living out the greatest commandment - Love the Lord your God. Second is like your neighbor as yourself. And so with St John Vianney we saw that he was a very prayerful man. He was a man of prayer. So he modeled that for his people and his own generosity with God. And we would think that had an impact on the people and they, too, became more generous with God in their own prayer life with Him.

We look at the life of St John Vianney, it's amazing to see how God's grace can work and operate in one person's life. You know, a man who almost wasn't ordained, a man who was going through formation during a very, very difficult and even dangerous time in the life of the Church in France. But still a man that was open to God's grace to be operative in his life. And remember, you know, 1 Corinthians 4:13 says that I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Right, I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. And John Vianney is a is a great example of that. Somebody who allowed God's grace to work through him. Now we're not just simply kind of passive and we just allow God's grace and we just don't do anything with it. But we we have to be operative. We have to cooperate with that grace in our life. So in our own prayer we ask the Lord, "Lord give me Your grace." Right, give me Your grace. As we heard in the opening prayer – give me Your love and Your grace; this is enough for me. It comes from that prayer from St Ignatius of Loyola. And if we're open to that like somebody like St John Vianney or St Ignatius of Loyola the Lord can do beautiful things, beautiful things in our life. He can really can transform us and transform our lives.

And so friends as I said this last conference I just wanted to place a saint out there before somebody who's inspired me and hopefully somebody who also is inspiring to you. And to and to realize that we have this great multitude of friends. This great multitude of friends in heaven. Right and we're in



communion with the multitudes of friends in heaven. Those who are in Christ Jesus are not dead. Right, Christ is the One that brings us to eternal life. So we are in communion with them. So we can always look to them and ask them to pray for us. That's very important praying to the saints in heaven especially for spiritual needs. I'm sure that you have your favorite saints. You've seen some my favorite saints. Ask them to pray for special needs. **But also what we we can do is we can imitate the example. The example is so, so important. To look at them and look at the life, the virtue that they they show forth, that shines forth in their life.** St Ignatius of Loyola wanted to be a great warrior, military captain, all these different things. And unfortunately he experienced a wound. A cannonball hit him in the leg and he experienced a wound. And so he had to return home and he was convalescing in his family's home. And while he was in his family's home what he did was he asked for some books. And the books he wanted to read were things about knights and chivalry and all these you know going into battle. And what he was given was he was given a book on Our Lord and a book on the lives of the saints. And it was in that bed convalescing unable to get out and do all sorts of different things by encountering Christ in the pages of those books and coming to know these new friends in the in the lives of the saints where St Ignatius of Loyola discovered his vocation. Eventually going on to to found the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits and do great things, beautiful things all for the name of Our Lord. So you can image in the pages of those books especially in the saints he was able to see particular virtues. Right, virtues in them that he found very inspiring. Virtues like John Paul II with his great love and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Virtues in people such as like Fulton Sheen this great love and devotion to Our Lady but especially to the Eucharist. And great love and devotion or virtue, I should say, in the saints as we have discovered in the life of St John Vianny and generosity. **So we're able to look at those virtues and see how they shine forth in the lives of the saints and hopefully what they do is they inspire us to imitate the example.** Again we come back to those words of St Paul – to be an imitator of me in as much as I am an imitator of Christ.

And let's conclude with one of my favorite prayers. This was the daily prayer from one of our new saints, Saint John Henry Newman. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. May He support us all the day long til the shades lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed and the fever of life is over and our work is done. Then in His mercy may He give us a safe lodging and a holy rest and peace at last. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.