

## HOMILY FOR THE VII SUNDAY OF EASTER

*Acts 1:12-14; 1 Pt 4:13-16; Jn 17:1-11a*

There is a familiar anecdote in the life of Saint John Mary Vianney, the Curé of Ars. He used to notice a peasant standing silently before the tabernacle in the village church every morning before going out to work in the fields. One day the Curé asked him, "What do you do here every morning?" The man replied simply: "I look at God and God looks at me." The Curé loved repeating this story because, as he said, "This says everything about prayer."

A few years back, I had the grace of spending a day in the small village of Ars-sur-Formans, the very place where St. John Mary Vianney lived, prayed, heard confessions, and poured out his life for his people. What struck me most was not grandeur or spectacle, but silence. Ars is small, simple, almost hidden away. Yet in that little village one senses something profound: generations of pilgrims have come there searching for God because one priest taught people how to pray, how to repent, and how to remain in the presence of Christ.

Standing in the church where the Curé prayed before the tabernacle for hours, I found myself thinking of that peasant's words: "I look at God and God looks at me." In our noisy and distracted world, Ars feels like a gentle reminder that holiness often grows quietly – in silence, in prayer, in faithfulness, in simply remaining with the Lord.

Today's readings invite us into that same spirit of prayerful waiting and trust. The season of Easter is drawing to a close. This past Thursday we celebrated the Ascension of the Lord, and today the Church places before us the image of the apostles gathered in prayer, waiting for the promised Holy Spirit. They did not yet know fully what lay ahead. They would face suffering, persecution, uncertainty, and fear. Yet they remained united in prayer.

That atmosphere of waiting and prayer is exactly what I sensed in Ars. The Curé of Ars understood that before the Church can evangelise, preach, or serve, it must first kneel. The power of his ministry did not come from extraordinary talents or eloquence, but from long hours spent before Christ in prayer.

The Responsorial Psalm today declares: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?" Those words sustained the apostles, and they sustained St. John Vianney as well. He knew hardship, loneliness, misunderstanding, and exhaustion. Yet he remained faithful because his life was rooted in Christ.

In the Gospel we hear the beginning of Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" at the Last Supper. Jesus prays for his disciples, asking the Father to protect them and keep them united. Before facing the Cross, Jesus turns to prayer. He entrusts everything to the Father.

That is perhaps the deepest lesson Ars offers pilgrims. Prayer is not escape from life; prayer is where life is entrusted to God. In that quiet village, one realises that holiness is not about doing extraordinary things but about belonging completely to God.

The Curé of Ars spent countless hours hearing confessions because he understood human suffering and human weakness. He knew that people carry burdens, fears, sins, disappointments, and wounds. Yet he also believed deeply in God's mercy. The same Jesus who prayed for His disciples continues to pray for us today.

Peter reminds us in the second reading not to be afraid of suffering for the sake of Christ. The apostles discovered that suffering united them more closely to Jesus. The Curé of Ars discovered the same truth in his own ministry. And we, too, are invited to trust that our struggles are not meaningless when united with Christ.

My visit to Ars reminded me that the Church is sustained not only by activity, plans, and programmes, but by prayer – quiet, faithful, persevering prayer. The peasant before the tabernacle, the Curé praying late into the night, the apostles gathered in the Upper Room, all teach us the same lesson: prayer begins by simply placing ourselves before God.

“We look at God, and God looks at us.”

That is where faith deepens.

That is where strength is found.

That is where holiness begins.

And perhaps this week we might ask ourselves: when was the last time I simply sat quietly in God's presence? Not asking for anything, not rushing, but simply remaining with Him?

For in the end, genuine prayer may be much simpler than we imagine: to look at God and allow God to look lovingly upon us.