

A Saint of Reconciliation



The Basilica of John Vianney in Ars, France

Chapter 17 tells about the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation as a source of God's healing love. A famous Saint, St. John Vianney, brought healing to a whole village in France through this Sacrament.

St. John Vianney was born at the time of the French Revolution. During his growing-up years, priests were forbidden to say Mass. Every so often, a priest would come through the neighborhood to say Mass secretly in a barn. That's where John made his First Communion.

By the time he was in his teens, the persecution was over. There was a great shortage of priests now. John wanted to become a priest himself, but his parents were poor and they needed his help to tend the

sheep. Finally, when he was twenty years old, he was allowed to go away to the seminary.

John was older than the other students. He always had a difficult time with his studies, especially Latin. Finally his teachers decided that, although he hadn't passed his examinations, he was such a goodhearted person that he would make a good priest. So they allowed him to be ordained. Then they set before him a tremendous challenge. They sent him to a tiny village called Ars, where people didn't seem to care much about God or each other.

When John got to Ars, he did everything he could to welcome the people to church. However, his most special gift was his ability to listen. In those days there were no psychologists. But in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, people had a place to pour out their hearts. Little by little, John's parishioners began to discover this wise priest who cared about them so deeply and who would offer them guidance when they came to the Sacrament for healing.

John heard people's confessions in a confessional box in the church for many hours a day. It was unheated in the winter, and hot and stuffy in the summertime. But the lines of people waiting to confess their sins got longer and longer. After awhile, they came from all over France and even from beyond its borders. By the time he died, he had served the people of Ars for 41 years. In that time, so many people had allowed the Holy Spirit to change their hearts that the whole character of the place was different. People were kinder to each other. The Curé of Ars, the man we now know as St. John Vianney, understood the great grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. (Curé means parish priest in French.)

In the story of St. John Vianney's life we have one more sign of the great blessings this Sacrament offers to us.



Pulpit from which John Vianney preached to his congregation