

# St. John Vianney sets standard for priests to imitate

When we were seminarians back in the 1950s, we took a course which has regrettably disappeared from several high school curricula. They called it “Public Speaking.”

We were high school sophomores at the Minor Seminary on Dodge Street. Both challenging and terrifying, the procedure began by asking each student to give an interesting speech. The challenge was finding it and memorizing it. The terror was standing before 40 classmates and presenting it from memory.

There were of course the high points of oratory. Someone always did Napoleon’s farewell to the Old Guard, maybe General McArthur’s speech at West Point that had been given not too many years before, an interesting article from an interesting or newsy magazine.

I can recall clearly reciting from memory an article found in *Readers’ Digest* singing the praises of then young conductor, Leonard Bernstein, a few details of which are still packed in memory. The other speech I found was a sermon of St. John Vianney, the Curé of Ars, and the patron of parish priests. Our teachers at the seminary were all diocesan priests and we were on the long track of becoming parish priests ourselves and it meant to lot to learn about St. John Vianney.

Jean Vianney was a parish priest in the tiny village of Ars, France, from 1818 until his death in 1859. Canonized in 1925, he was named in 1929 by Pope Pius XI as the patron of parish priests that they might imitate his compassion and generous devotion to his congregation without regard for recognition or reward. His reputation as a parish

## *Year for Priests*

By Msgr. Patrick Keleher



priest, confessor and spiritual counselor spread through all of France and he often heard confessions and counseled all who came to him, sometimes 18 hours a day.

Those early seminary years often hearing about the Curé of Ars were a great motivation for devotion to parish life. I am sure that was in the mind of Bishop Joseph Burke who built the seminary in East Aurora and immediately named it St. John Vianney Seminary and where the bishop lies buried in front of the main chapel.

It’s the same spirit that encouraged the seminary’s board of trustees in 1985 to “honor individuals whose lives reflect the qualities of Christian dedication and service that marked the life of St. John Vianney” by establishing the Curé of Ars Award. For the last 14 years they have honored great examples of that ideal: bishops, parish priests and outstanding lay couples and individuals who have kept that spirit alive in our diocese.

Pope Benedict XVI dedicated this year to the priesthood by calling it, “The Year for Priests,” which began Aug. 4, St. John Vianney’s feast day. This year the board of trustees has chosen to

name two honorees. The Galasso Foundation who have been long term supporters of the educational programs at our seminary and focused on the quality of priests called to serve here.

The foundation has clearly made a richly positive difference for the quality of ministry in Buffalo. The foundation was established by August Galasso as “his way of showing his gratitude as well as providing the same opportunities for generations to come.” Galasso attributed his success in life to his Catholic education.

The board has also chosen to honor Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop of New York, who will make his inaugural visit to the diocese to accept the award. Like the Curé of Ars, Archbishop Dolan is deeply committed to the care of God’s people in his immense diocese. He has shown a strong priority for the ministry of pastoral care, the poor and the priests with whom he serves.

The awards will be given at the Curé of Ars dinner Sunday, Nov. 8, at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo. Before the dinner, the Archbishop will celebrate Solemn Vespers at St. Joseph Cathedral at 4 p.m. Bishop Edward U. Kmiec has encouraged all of us to join him and Archbishop Dolan for this noteworthy event. Think about honoring your parish priest by inviting him to join in for what will be an exciting Sunday afternoon.

You can contact the Foundation for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Buffalo at 847-8373 for all the information you need.

*Msgr. Patrick Keleher is director of the Newman Center on the University at Buffalo north campus.*

*This column appeared in the October 2009 Western New York Catholic, part of the monthly series of “Year for Priests” columns.*