

## SAINTS

K of C Council 12749

August 4, 2010

Today is the feast day of St. John Vianney.

The name takes me back to my freshman year at San Gabriel Mission High School where I was taught by the Claretian Missionary Fathers and Dominican nuns.

St. John Vianney was also the name of one of the high schools that we played in football. At the time, my freshman religion teacher was Father Francis Xavier Hogan and I can remember Father Hogan telling the young students that everyone's goal should be to be a saint. To a fourteen year old young boy this sounded like quite a daunting task.

But Fr. Hogan explained that to be a saint simply was a Church affirmation that that person had made it to heaven. In fact, he assured us that the majority of our mothers were going to be saints. And, he admonished us not to be anti-Semitic as we were going to meet a number of important Jews in heaven –like the Blessed Virgin Mary.

And it was Fr. Hogan who taught us about feast days – each day was usually a celebration of a particular saint and we should read about them and try to emulate their lives as an aid to try to get to heaven. So before today's Knights of Columbus meeting I read about St. John Vianney in Butler's "Lives of the Saints."

It turns out that St. John Vianney was a poor student. He was considered by the French Army to be a deserter. When he became a priest he waged a relentless war against swearing. He was adamant about performing any work on Sunday that was not absolutely necessary. But above all, he was profoundly against dancing maintaining that it was an occasion of sin to those who took part and even to those who only looked on. He was merciless: give up dancing, private or public, or he would refuse to give you absolution.

I don't know about others, but for me it's difficult to identify with St. John Vianney as a model to try to help me get to heaven. But....it made me start to think: other than an affirmation of getting to heaven, what is a saint, anyway?

At first it is the diversity of the lives of saints that strikes me: they are male and female, educated and not, began life rich and poor, are from all countries. Some die young, some die old. Some are quiet and some are very energetic. What are the common dominators?

After graduating from San Gabriel Mission High School I attended Loyola University. I can remember reading the freshman manual that described the Jesuit philosophy of the school: To Make Us Men of Two Worlds. In fact, it was the same goal as the Claretian Fathers, to make us saints. In some way all saints were of two worlds.

In the spiritual world they were very intimately engaged with God. They were constantly aware of the relationship with God as they carried out God's work in this world.

But what exactly, in their diversity, did they DO in this world. I believe the common thread of all saints is that by their lives they attempted to RELIEVE THE DISTRESS OF OTHERS.

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This was accomplished by many means: feeding the hungry, performing miracles, comforting the sick and suffering, attending to the poor, giving hope to those who were hopeless, praying for and bringing joy to others.

If we are to be saints it might help us to think: do I cause distress to others or do I try to relieve their distress?

If I remember correctly, St. John Vianney High School beat Mission High school in football in my freshman year. But, with the help of God, we can aim at heaven if we try to relieve distress -- even if we enjoy dancing.