

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Friday, 4th Week of Lent; Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

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*Knights of Columbus Board Meeting*

*New York City*

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## **Introduction**

May the Lord forgive me and my seventh grade classmates, for habitually picking on a newly arrived fellow student. We did this in our gross immaturity, not only because he was a newcomer, but also because he was always neatly groomed, always did his homework, never broke a rule, liked the teacher, and in general put us all to shame. Memories fade but as far as I recall, no one really welcomed him and no one really tried to get to know him. You might say that our young hearts were hardened against him.

Later on, when I was a junior in high school, I happened to meet this unfortunate classmate. We struck up a conversation and, lo and behold, I discovered that he was talented and interesting and that we had a lot in common. That chance encounter taught me one of life's important lessons: to know another person one has to open not only the mind but the heart, as well. It also taught me that blindly following the crowd closes both the mind and the heart.

## **The Closed Heart**

In today's reading from the Book of Wisdom, a horde of wicked people ganged up against a prophet. The prophet's truthfulness, goodness, and holiness infuriated that wicked mob. What made them even angrier is that the prophet would not abandon either his relationship with God or his adherence to God's Law. "His life is not like that of others," they said, "and his ways are different." Blinded by the wickedness

they held in common, these people closed their hearts to a man whose words and deeds could have led them to the peace and joy of knowing God. Instead, they decided to see whether his love of God and his right living would hold up if they were to persecute him and condemn him to death.

That scene in the Book of Wisdom came to life in the Gospel where Jesus was in the crosshairs of just about everyone. The leaders of the people were plotting to kill him, their hearts long since having been hardened against Jesus. Meanwhile Jesus' brothers, that is to say, his relatives, wanted him to appear openly at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, perhaps so that they could trade on Jesus' status as a celebrity. Reading between the lines of John's Gospel, we get the idea that their hearts were anything but open to Jesus and his mission. So too the local populace in Jerusalem was chattering about Jesus. Among other things, they were opining about whether Jesus' earthly origins disqualified him to be the Messiah. They thought they knew who Jesus was and where he came from. In reality, their hearts and minds were closed to Jesus and his mission.

In the midst of this scene, Jesus cries out: "You know me and also know where I am from. Yet I did not come on my own, but the one who sent me, whom you do not know, is true. I know him, because I am from him and he sent me." With these words, Jesus reveals himself as the Incarnate Son of God sent by the Father into the world as its Redeemer. But their hearts were hardened. They tried to arrest him.

### **The Heart of St. John Vianney**

On this Lenten weekday, we celebrate the Holy Eucharist accompanied by the relic of the priestly heart of St. John Vianney, the saintly parish priest, the Cure of Ars. His priestly ministry in a small parish in an obscure village was a flash point that reignited the evangelization of Europe in the 19th century. St. John Vianney was not a masterful theologian or a brilliant strategic planner. Rather, his heart, his priestly heart, was radically open to Jesus. Because this priest opened his own heart to Jesus, he was able to open the hearts of thousands upon thousands of people who streamed into the Village of Ars so that he could hear their Confession and to hear him preach.

St. John's Vianney's heart embodies his deep inward openness to Jesus. Through prayer centered on the Eucharist and a deep asceticism, this saintly priest attained

the heights of friendship with Jesus. Truly did he know Jesus and truly did he know his heavenly Father as he preached the Gospel with simplicity and love, celebrated the Eucharist with exquisite devotion, heard confessions with deep insight into each individual penitent, and confronted the devil who sought to undermine his ministry. In other words, he lived his priesthood in the presence of Christ, in his mystery, in his truth, in the midst of his Church. This priest's motivation was not to make a name for himself nor even to be useful to others, but simply to live his life only for God and for the sake of God. Living for God, his heart was oriented to the truth of the Church's faith and it was God's grace that shaped the root desires of his heart. And, as any good priest discovers sooner or later, when he is truly in love with God he is also at home with his people in their joy and hope, their grief and anxiety.

### **What to Pray For**

There's an awful lot of things to pray for these days in the life of the Church but as we celebrate today's liturgy in the presence of St. John Vianney's priestly heart, let us pray deeply for people like me, namely, bishops and priests. Because we are trained in the ecclesiastical sciences and live, as it were, on the inside of the Church, we are sometimes deluded into thinking that our hearts are open to Jesus but they may in fact be closed to him in some significant ways. In hardness of heart, we may substitute other things for his love - comfort, power, prestige - the name for this is clericalism - and it has deeply wounded the Body of Christ. Because you, as the family of the Knights of Columbus, love and support priests and bishops and work earnestly for vocations, please pray that all of us, myself included, will have a heart like that of John Vianney - a heart that lives in Jesus' presence, lives only for God, and is oriented only to God. Only such priestly hearts are worthy to serve God's People and our ailing world.

And, of course, St. John Vianney's open heart is meant for you as well. His presence in our midst and his powerful intercession lead us to the open heart of Christ, the Christ who is from the Father, the Christ whose heart was pierced by the soldier's lance as he hung upon the Cross. From that heart there flowed the Blood and Water that are the never-ending fountain of the Church's sacramental life. Let us pray for ourselves that we too will come to know Jesus intimately, that our hearts will open to his friendship, that we will conform our lives to his. And let us pray that through our

witness, precisely as members of the Order, as a people of charity, unity, and fraternity, will help to open the hearts of many who have forsaken Christ and the Church to follow Jesus who alone is the way, the truth and the life. May God bless us and keep us always in his love! Vivat Jesus!

To remind ourselves of Jesus' true origins, his authoritative claim upon our lives, and the price of our redemption - to do all of this is simply to acknowledge the dimensions of what it means truly to open our hearts to Christ. As today we receive the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ let us see in this mystery the solvent that strips our hearts of all pretention and dissolves their stoniness - so that we might enter upon this last week of Lent and the solemnities of Holy Week with mind and heart renewed! Vivat Jesus!