

Major relic of St. John Vianney returning to Archdiocese of Baltimore for veneration

Several priests in the Archdiocese of Baltimore said they hope the upcoming visit of a major relic of a 19th-century priest known for his holiness will inspire those who pray before the holy object to follow in the saint's footsteps on the path to sanctity.

The incorrupt heart of France's St. John Vianney is returning to the Archdiocese of Baltimore Jan. 11-13 as part of a national relic pilgrimage sponsored by the Knights of Columbus. It will be available for veneration at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore, St. John in Westminster and the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland.

The relic, which is on loan from a shrine named for St. John Vianney in France, was last in Baltimore during the November meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as church leaders grappled with the church's response to the clergy sexual abuse crisis. It was also in Baltimore in August for the 136th Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus.

Ordained to the priesthood despite his difficulty with Latin, St. John Vianney labored for many years as the pastor of a small parish in the rural community of Ars, France. He heard confessions for up to 18 hours a day and was said to be able to discern sins before they were confessed.

Father James Boric, rector of the Baltimore Basilica, said St. John Vianney was a model priest because of his "absolute devotion" to the sacraments and his people.

"All he did was stay in the confessional, celebrate Mass, preach with great conviction and catechize his entire parish," Father Boric said. "There were no gimmicks. He just gave people Christ. His goal wasn't just to get people to be 'okay,' but to get them to be saints. That's what all of us need."

It took St. John Vianney, the “Curé of Ars,” a decade to get people to come to confession and buy into a holy way of life, Father Boric said, but he persevered and succeeded.

“If we could all live that radical, holy way of life,” Father Boric said, “this whole world would change.”

Father Mark Bialek, pastor of St. John in Westminster, said the saint shows everyone what it means to have hearts intimately configured to that of Jesus Christ.

“He shows us that holiness can be contagious and that the radical call of laying down our lives for the savior is not just for the select few, but for all of us,” Father Bialek said.

The pastor added that sacrificial love is a part of every vocation.

“Perhaps this visit will allow our own hearts to be opened even wider,” Father Bialek said.

In Catholic tradition, a relic is not worshiped, but venerated as a holy object in recognition that God worked through the saint with which it is associated.

“First-class” relics include physical parts of a saint, such as a heart or bone. “Second-class” relics are objects routinely used or touched by the saint during his or her life, while “third-class” relics are objects touched to a first-class relic.

“Although to the uninitiated the veneration of relics may seem morbid,” Father Bialek said, “relics engage our senses, inspire our faith and give witness to what God can do through us if we become fully his instrument.”

Father Bialek added that the national tour could not have come at a more appropriate and needed moment.

“During a time of unrest and calls for meaningful reform within the church, we see this visit as an opportunity to pray for the universal church, to intercede for our bishops and priests while fostering reconciliation and heightened devotion to the Eucharist that unites us as the Body of Christ,” he said.

The Baltimore Basilica's website noted that the two major goals of the relic's visit are to pray for more men to come forward to become holy priests and to pray for the reform of all current priests.

St. John Vianney's heart, housed in a special reliquary, will be available for veneration at the Baltimore Basilica Jan. 11 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the undercroft. Archbishop William E. Lori, Supreme Chaplain of the Knights of Columbus, will celebrate a 6:15 p.m. Mass that day. Father Patrice Chocholski, successor of St. John Vianney as the Curé of Ars, will present a lecture on the life of the saint following the Mass. Eucharistic adoration will also be offered from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the basilica's undercroft adoration chapel. Confessions will be heard from 11:30 a.m. to noon and 5-6 p.m.

The heart will be available for veneration at St. John in Westminster Jan. 12 from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Masses will be offered at 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. that day, with a holy hour for vocations offered from noon to 1 p.m. Confessions will be offered 9 a.m.-11:30 a.m. and 1-4:30 p.m.

The Cathedral of Mary Our Queen will host the heart for veneration from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Jan. 13. All priests have been invited to the cathedral to pray vespers in the presence of the relic and to renew their ordination promises.

*For more information, click **here**.*

Also see:

Hundreds flock to pray at public veneration of St. John Vianney's heart