

# St. John Vianney's heart will be available for veneration in Baltimore

The incorrupt heart of one of the Catholic Church's most beloved saints will be available for public veneration Nov. 10-11 at [St. Mary's Historic Seminary Chapel](#) on Paca Street in Baltimore as part of a national relic tour sponsored by the Knights of Columbus.

The relic of St. John Vianney, a 19th-century French parish priest known as the "Curé of Ars," will be displayed in a special reliquary. The holy object will also be present during the U.S. bishops' day of prayer when they meet in Baltimore for the fall gathering of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Nov. 12-14.

"It's absolutely wonderful and exciting," said Deacon Vito S. Piazza Sr., director of St. Mary's Spiritual Center and Historic Site and a permanent deacon at St. Joseph in Sykesville. "I think at this time of crisis in our church, it's certainly appropriate to venerate a relic of the patron saint of parish priests and to pray for our priests and our bishops that we can move through this difficult time."

St. Mary's chapel is located on the original site of St. Mary's Seminary, the first Catholic seminary in the United States. The seminary is currently located in Roland Park.

"Over 7,000 young men prepared for the priesthood here and came through the doors of our chapel while the seminary was located on Paca Street," Deacon Piazza said. "Over 110 of them became bishops throughout the United States."

St. John Vianney lived at a time when the Catholic Church was under attack following the French Revolution. Ordained a priest despite having difficulty learning Latin, he led a small agrarian parish in Ars. Known for his holiness and prayerfulness, St. John Vianney heard confessions for up to 16 hours at a time and was said to be able to discern sins before they were confessed.

“His work as a confessor is seen as one of his most remarkable accomplishments,” Deacon Piazza said.

The heart of St. John Vianney is kept at a shrine dedicated to the saint in Ars. As a part of his body, it is called a “first-class” relic as opposed to a “second-class” relic – an object worn or touched by a saint.

The heart is considered “incorrupt” because it has avoided decomposition after the saint’s 1859 death – a sign, but not proof, of a person’s holiness in Catholic teaching.

The Catholic Church considers relics to be holy objects that may be venerated, but not worshipped.

Carl Anderson, Knights of Columbus Supreme Knight, announced a national relic tour in an Aug. 21 letter to Knights of Columbus chaplains and members. He proposed St. John Vianney as a model of priestly love and service.

“The Knights of Columbus – laymen, priests and chaplains together – will have an important role to play in rebuilding the church,” Anderson wrote. “We must commit the Knights of Columbus to work for repentance, reform and rebuilding of the church.”

The relic of St. John Vianney was previously in Baltimore during the 136<sup>th</sup> Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus in August, brought from France by Father Patrice Chocholski, rector of the St. John Vianney Shrine.

During an Aug. 9 Knights of Columbus Memorial Mass, Archbishop William E. Lori said St. John Vianney had “a priestly heart and revived a dying parish by the sheer force of his holiness and integrity.”

*St. John’s relic will be available for veneration Nov. 10 from noon until a 5 p.m. Mass and Nov. 11 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the historic upper chapel at St. Mary’s Spiritual Center, 600 North Paca Street, Baltimore.*

*Also see:*

[Baltimore parish celebrates 150th anniversary of precious icon’s arrival](#)

*Email George Matysek at [gmatysek@CatholicReview.org](mailto:gmatysek@CatholicReview.org)*