

FEASTS OF THE WEEK

Monday 1st August. Memoria of St Alphonsus Mary Liguori, Bishop and Doctor of the Church.



Alphonsus was born in the village of Marianella near Naples on the 27th September 1696. He was ably nurtured by his parents, spiritually and intellectually. He was an outstanding student, graduating in law at the age of sixteen – even accounting for the era this was exceptional. He was admitted to the Neapolitan Bar. In 1723 he lost a case which caused him significant disappointment.

Although he could have excelled in his profession and achieved high office, the event proved pivotal in moving his concentration from worldly ambition toward service of God.

Despite a great deal of familial opposition, Alphonsus embarked upon ecclesiastical formation. He felt called to establish a new congregation. In 1732 he prepared the foundations for what would become the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer – The Redemptorists. His objective was for the new Congregation to focus upon working for the salvation of the most abandoned souls. Despite the wonderful nature of this objective, Alphonsus faced many obstacles and outright opposition. There was much tension between the Church and the then Neapolitan State. His efforts brought him both a crown and a cross. In 1756 he was appointed Bishop of Sant Agatha dei Goti. His episcopal ministry was most fruitful until his retirement resulting from ill health in 1775. He retired to a congregational house. Throughout his life, Alphonsus was a prolific author, producing a comprehensive corpus on moral theology and spirituality. His moral teaching charts a prudent route between rigorism and laxism. Amongst his many works you will find the magnificent ‘Introduction to the Devout Life’, a text I always have to hand and which I happily recommend to all. The simplicity of its style masks the most profound advice and practical encouragement regarding progress in the spiritual life. Every Catholic should possess a copy! Alphonsus died at Nocera de Pagani on the 1st August 1787. He was canonised in 1839 by Pope Gregory XVI and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1871 by Pope Pius IX.

Tuesday 2nd August. Feast of the Portiuncula: St Francis Builds his Church of St Mary of the Angels
(Parish Feast of Dedication)

St Francis of Assisi experienced a private revelation whilst contemplating the Byzantine Style Crucifix he found in the semi-derelict church of San Damiano of Assisi. He was inspired to rebuild and restore the church. This was the beginning of the transformation of his life. He would renounce his entitlement to inheritance and live in complete simplicity. For a number of years he lived alone but eventually he attracted seven faithful followers and together they took up residence at the Portiuncula in Assisi. This was located near a leper colony. Francis would die at the Portiuncula in 1226, aged 45. The church built at the Portiuncula is dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels.



Thursday 4th August -Memoria of St John Mary Vianney, Priest.



St John Baptist Mary Vianney was born at Dardilly near Lyons in 1786, the son of a peasant farmer. He obtained little formal education in his childhood. The Republican era inflicted a radical secularism on the French State and the Church suffered greatly. John was conscripted into the army but eventually deserted, along with many others, with the intention of pursuing a path toward priesthood. He first studies in the seminary at Verrieres but transferred to Lyons in 1813. He found the studies most difficult but was eventually ordained to the priesthood in 1815. The seminary at Lyons described him as the most un-learned student but the most devout. Today he is universally identified as the Cure d’Ars. He became Parish Priest of Ars-en-Dombes three years after his ordination. It was from this remote French hamlet, that had a population of just two hundred and fifty souls, that his reputation spread as an insightful confessor and director of souls.

FEASTS OF THE WEEK (CONTINUED)

His life was marked by significant mortifications and austerities. He preached a sermon every day at 11 o'clock. Many penitents travelled to visit him and many lives were transformed by his priestly ministry. He retained a childlike simplicity and humility whilst exercising a mystical ability that enabled him to perceive the injuries present in the souls of those who came to him for confession. He would regularly hear confessions for sixteen hours each day. In later life, when the monarchy had been restored, the Cure d'Ars was honoured with a Knighthood of the Imperial Order of the Legion of Honour. Although he was not allowed to refuse the honour, he refused the formal investiture and never wore the insignia. He died on the 4th August 1859. He was canonized in 1925 by Pope Pius XI.

Friday 5th August – Memoria of the Dedication of the Basilica of St Mary Major.

There is an ancient tradition in Rome which describes how the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to a Patrician named John, during which she instructed him to construct a church dedicated to her honour. The spot was marked by a fall of snow in the midst of summer. John founded and endowed the church during the fourth century pontificate of Liberius (Pope from 353 to 366). The church was first identified as the Liberian Basilica. Pope Sixtus III enlarged the structure in 435 and specifically designated the title in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The magnificent façade was added to the complex in 1741. The designation 'Mary Major' indicates its dignity as first amongst the churches that honour the B.V.M., in Rome and throughout the world. Along with the Basilicas of St John Lateran and St Peter's, the Basilica of St Mary Major has an altar that is exclusively reserved for use by the Holy Father.



Saturday 6th August – Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord.



Today's feast marks the occasion when Our Lord manifested his divine glory to the three most cherished Apostles – Peter, James and John. The Transfiguration took place at the summit of Mount Tabor, a rounded mountain-top located in Galilee. The Lord's countenance became resplendent and his garments shone. Moses, the Lawgiver, and Elijah, the greatest of the Prophets, appeared and conversed with him. The Apostles were overwhelmed, with Peter declaring that "it is good for us to be here" and offering to construct three tents. The Father's voice declares that "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; listen to him." The same three Apostles would be close to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Transfiguration provided a glimpse of the Lord's divinity and the future glorified humanity of Jesus. This revelation strengthened the three Apostles for their future witness and ministry.

ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO THE GRAVE OF ST JOHN KEMBLE

This year's Pilgrimage takes place on Sunday 21st August. People have prayed at the Grave of St John Kemble from the time of his martyrdom in 1679. Further details to follow in later newsletters. All enquiries to: The Pilgrimage Secre-