

# THE PASTOR'S CORNER

## SAINT JEANNE JUGAN

I have lately wondered in my five years or so here at Saint Marianne Cope Parish, why so few candles are lit at the shrine of Saint Jude (which stands over by the 2nd Street door of Saint Thomas of Canterbury Church). Perhaps it is that many in the parish don't know who the statue represents. There is no name plate identifying him (which I will fix shortly!), and the flame above his head, which symbolizes the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, doesn't distinguish him from the other Apostles. Nevertheless, for one reputed to be a patron of lost causes (more on this later), I might have expected a blazing fire of lit candles during the COVID-19 pandemic. I must confess myself an ignorance of him.

Having come into the Catholic Faith so late (at age 27), I was not well acquainted with what has been called the cult of the saints. I found one, Saint Benedict Joseph Labre, whose life seemed to say something to me, but for the most part that article of the creed in which we profess the Communion of the Saints had no practical meaning for me. There was so much to learn about our Faith that I put the saints on "the back burner". (Saint Francis de Sales exhorts us to make friends with the saints.) As it turned out, so much of my relationship to the saints seems to be by happenstance.

That is especially true of my relationship with Saint Jeanne Jugan, whose memorial falls on this Sunday. Way back when, I had met her legacy, a wonderful religious order of nuns who cared for the elderly poor at the Little Sisters of the Poor in Washington, D.C. and then after as a priest with their Jeanne Jugan Residence in the Bronx. It was in a pilgrimage to Rome in 2013, with the Little Sisters of the Poor and Father Dunn, their chaplain, for the canonization of their founder that I suddenly discovered a new friend. I found her story too compelling to ignore.

Jeanne was born in the village of Brittany in France in 1792. One of eight children, her father was lost at sea when she was almost four years old. Though much of revolutionary war France was hostile to the Catholic Faith and despite her family's poverty, Jeanne was taught the faith as well as reading and writing by a number of women who belonged to an ecclesial movement committed to teaching children their catechism. From very early on, their example of Christian charity inspired Jeanne herself to do what

she could to care for the poor and share the faith with those who had not the opportunity to learn. In 1839, having noticed the wretchedness of many elderly and abandoned women, Jeanne Jugan brought home a widow one day and gave the old woman her own bed, and slept herself in the attic. As other old women came to stay as well, other young women – inspired by Jeanne's charity and wanting to make a difference themselves – came to help. From this came an astounding order of sisters, consecrated women who established homes all over the world for the elderly poor.

At the heart of Jeanne Jugan's love was the love of Christ and the belief that "the poor are our Lord." To find Jesus, however, is never enough. For the saint, taking up the cross of Christ was a necessary part of following Him. Jeanne later took upon herself great suffering in imitation of the Suffering Servant. Sadly, she was cast aside as superior by an ambitious priest (Lord, save me from that sin!). For years after, she went out begging for the work of the sisters. Eventually, she was forced to retire and lived in obscurity afterward. Ironically, for many years after her death, few of the Little Sisters of the Poor knew that Jeanne Jugan had founded their world-wide community. However, she was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1982, and canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 11, 2009. The miracle which confirmed her life with God in heaven, the cure through her intercession of Dr. Edward Gatz of Nebraska from a most certain death to cancer, was joyfully acknowledged when Dr. Gatz and his wife carried the gifts for the Mass to our Holy Father.

After the canonization of their "little sister" at their home in the Bronx and with the pilgrims I met in Rome, I began to see this extraordinary women present in those who carried on her work and those they served. Like Saint Marianne Coe, Saint Teresa of Calcutta or Sister Mary Alphonse (Rose Hawthorne, founder of Rosary Hill and the Hawthorne Dominicans), she shows us that we can only know Christ wholly if we include the poor and the elderly and the saints among our friends.

In this Sunday's bulletin, the daughters of Saint Jeanne Jugan, the Little Sisters of the Poor, invite all of us to show the same faith in the Lord's care for us that Saint Jeanne had by praying the Rosary for an end to this pandemic. It might be a good opportunity to become friends with Saint Jeanne Jugan too.