

October 2025 Recommendation: *Shreveport Martyr Father Jean Pierre: Fearful Steps Strengthened by Hope* by Very Reverend Peter B. Mangum, JCL, William Ryan Smith, MA, Cheryl H. White, PhD

Death has a peculiar way of clarifying life. When yellow fever ravaged Shreveport in the brutal summer of 1873, it wasn't some abstract threat—it was a monster with fangs. Houses emptied, coffins filled, and silence settled over the streets like a suffocating fog. But while others fled, one young French priest stayed.

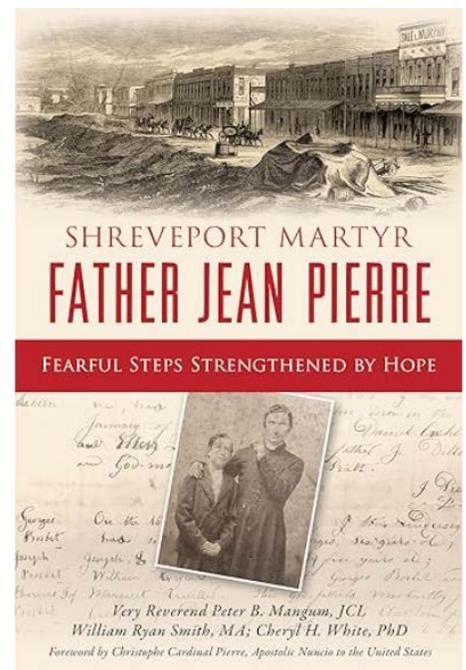
Fr. Jean Pierre, barely thirty, knew what that meant. The disease was merciless. He'd already watched fellow clergy fall, one by one. Yet he remained, walking straight into the heart of contagion with nothing but a stole around his neck and the hope of heaven in his chest. This isn't just the story of a priest—it's the story of a man whose trembling footsteps carried the strength of grace.

The authors bring Fr. Jean Pierre's witness to life with scholarly precision and spiritual warmth. They don't sugarcoat the dread or dramatize the sacrifice. They lay it bare—the horror, the holiness, the humanity.

And here's where it strikes a nerve: in a Church still grappling with comfort, fear, and the temptation to play it safe, Fr. Pierre's story is a spiritual slap on the cheek. Wake up, it says. This is what it means to live the Gospel.

Ten theologically tethered takeaways [with Catechism references]

- Heroic charity isn't reserved for saints on pedestals—it's demanded of every Christian:** Fr. Pierre didn't perform a grand gesture. He fulfilled a duty. One we're all called to, in some measure. [CCC 2447] “The works of mercy are charitable actions ... we come to the aid of our neighbor...”
- True hope doesn't eliminate fear; it gives you the courage to walk through it:** He feared the fever, but he didn't let it dictate his choices. Hope isn't a feeling—it's a virtue forged in the fire. [CCC 1817] “Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire...eternal life.”
- Suffering embraced for the sake of others becomes redemptive.** Fr. Pierre's death wasn't senseless. It mirrored Christ's own offering. [CCC 618] “By Christ's passion and death a new meaning to suffering”
- The priesthood is more than a role—it's a radical conformation to Christ:** In Fr. Pierre, we see the priest as victim, servant, shepherd. [CCC 1548]: “In the ecclesial service... Christ himself is present to his Church.”
- The communion of saints isn't theoretical—it's living, local, and looks like Shreveport:** Holiness has zip codes. And in 1873, it was in northwest Louisiana. [CCC 946–948] “The saints who are closely united to Christ in heaven, fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness.”
- A holy death testifies louder than a thousand sermons:** He didn't preach with words. His body did the talking. [CCC 1014]: “Memento mori ...”
- The corporal works of mercy are not optional add-ons—they're evidence of authentic faith:** Fr. Pierre lived them with every hospital visit, every deathbed vigil. [CCC 2447] “Feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick...”
- Sanctity often hides in obscurity—until crisis reveals it:** No one expected a French émigré in a fever swamp to become a model of holiness. But grace blooms in unlikely soil. [CCC 828] “By canonizing some of the faithful... the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit.”
- Martyrdom isn't limited to swords and blood—it includes quiet, voluntary self-offering:** He wasn't slain by tyrants, but by love that wouldn't retreat. [CCC 2473] “Martyrdom is the supreme witness to the truth of the faith...”
- Catholicism is incarnational—God works through bodies, blood, cities, and cemeteries:** The grave of Fr. Pierre in Shreveport isn't just a historical site. It's a declaration: here, a man loved God more than his life. [CCC 1010] “Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning...”



So why should parishioners read this book? Because we've grown tired. We've spiritualized faith into slogans and outsourced holiness to “someone else.” Fr. Jean Pierre's story rips the veil off our excuses. It reminds us that love isn't safe, that vocation costs blood, and that fidelity still has a name—His. Reading *Fearful Steps Strengthened by Hope* isn't just learning history. It's an examination of conscience. It's a challenge to every priest, parent, catechist, and pew-sitter who's ever said, “Let someone else go.” We all walk fearful steps. But some, like Fr. Pierre, let hope lead the way. And if he could do it—with trembling hands, in a Louisiana plague—what's stopping us?