

# THE EIGHT NORTH AMERICAN MARTYRS

by Brother Andre Marie

*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*

Precious to God are His missionaries, those heroic souls who in imitation of the Twelve Apostles “go forth and teach all nations” the way of salvation. Yet, in this present age of religious tolerance and laxity it is unfortunate, but not surprising, to find the ancient apostolic spirit dwindling. What need is there for missionaries if, as many today erroneously contend, the only requirement for salvation is personal sincerity in whatever one believes? Indeed, the very life of all apostolic labors is Our Lord’s command to ‘teach’ every human creature the truths necessary for their salvation. Our Lord added to this commission, “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned.”

Members of the Society of Jesus who dedicated themselves to the conversion of the American Indians took Christ’s words very literally. They journeyed from Renaissance France to the frontiers of North America that they might preach and baptize. After pouring the saving waters of Baptism on a dying Indian child, Saint John de Brebeuf, the great pioneer of this mission, exclaimed with joy, “For this one single occasion I would travel all the way from France; I would cross the great ocean to win one little soul for Our Lord!” And so pleased was God with the genuine zeal and the extraordinary sacrifices of these Jesuit apostles that He bestowed upon Father Brebeuf and seven of his fellow missionaries the glorious crown of martyrdom. The following is the incredible tale of the Eight North American Martyrs.

The Society of Jesus had been founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola during the turbulent times following the Protestant Revolution. By the dawning of the seventeenth century the Jesuits had won renown as zealous missionaries and ardent defenders of the Catholic Faith.

The Order was still at the peak of its power, prestige, and holiness when a new mission field began to unfold. France, eldest daughter of the Church, was beginning to colonize North America, and the vast untamed regions of the New World were inhabited by pagan natives who had never before been evangelized.

Father John De Brebeuf, a giant of a man in stature and in holiness, was destined by God to be the impetus, the strength and the inspiration of the new Jesuit mission efforts in America.

## EARLY YEARS

Brebeuf was born on the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1593, at Conde`, about seven miles from Saint Lo in eastern Normandy. In his youth he was a strong, outdoor-loving boy and an industrious worker on his family’s extensive farm. The young Brebeuf towered above his peers. He often referred to his family name, which means ox in French, and jokingly professed that he was meant only to carry heavy burdens. But John had been blessed with a pious nature and a good mind as well as broad shoulders, and instead of gathering crops from the fields of Normandy, it was God’s will that he should reap the harvest of souls abounding in New France. He responded to God’s calling and was received into the Society of Jesus in 1617. Before long he became very ill. The sickness reduced John’s huge frame to that of a skeleton and it was believed the young Jesuit had not long to live. Following his ordination in 1622, however, his health seemed to improve miraculously and he soon regained his former vigor.

The newly ordained priest had often dreamed of becoming a missionary, and upon recovering his health his desires of being sent to the New World increased. He was very much aware of the recent attempts to evangelize the North American Indians. Through the assistance of the devout Catholic explorer Samuel de Champlain, the Franciscan Recollets had arrived at Quebec in 1615. The Recollets had labored heroically for over ten years, but had encountered many problems from the Huguenots, who controlled the settlement. In addition to this, the Recollets were far too few in number to effect any lasting result in the conversion of the savages. Therefore, in 1624 they had petitioned help from the Jesuits, who were eager to accept the invitation to New France.

## **ARRIVAL IN THE NEW WORLD**

It was in June, 1625, that the future martyr first set foot on the shores of the New World. The thirty-two year old missionary was the youngest of the three Jesuit priests on the expedition. Upon arrival they joined the Recollets at their little convent on the Saint Charles River not far from the settlement of Quebec.

Brebeuf knew that his formal education offered little, if any, of the training needed for the work he was about to undertake. He spent his first days in New France acquiring from the Recollets as much knowledge as he could about the savages he had come to convert. Among other things, he learned that the largest Indian nation was the Algonquin, which inhabited an extensive territory including Nova Scotia and the area north of the Saint Lawrence River. They were a nomadic people and it was clear to the Recollets that such tribes as the Algonquins could be converted only when induced to stop their wandering.

There was a good possibility, however, of evangelizing the Hurons, who lived in permanent well-fortified settlements in the distant western regions north of Lake Ontario. The Hurons, thus named by the French expression *hure*, meaning a disheveled head of hair, called themselves the Wyandot nation. They were more docile than the Indians who frequented Quebec. Their population was about thirty thousand.

Greatly impressed were the Indians with the size and bearing of the bearded "Blackrobe" who smiled so amiably at them. Unable to pronounce his name, they dubbed him Echon and Echon he would be from that time on among all the Indians.

Echon spent the following winter with a tribe of Algonquins known as the Montagnais in order to grow more accustomed to the Indian way of living. During this five-month hunting venture the saint beheld everything the Recollets had related about these primitive people. The suffocating fires and foul odors within made the huts most uncomfortable. The savages were rough, impatient, and thoroughly given over to every impurity. Their "divinities" were the sun, the moon, and almost any material object. Sorcerers led wild feasts and orgies to appease the spirits, and superstition accompanied all they did. Father Brebeuf, convinced of Satan's dominion over these poor souls, prayed fervently for them.

## **TO THE HURONS**

Rather than dampening his spirit, the events of Echon's winter sojourn only increased his already ardent zeal. His desire now was to live with the Hurons. To his great delight, in the summer of 1626, Father Brebeuf and a Recollet, Father Joseph de la Roche Daillon, were selected for the important assignment of establishing a mission in the midst of this distant tribe. In July, the two priests met a Huron trading party at Cap de la Victoire and departed with them on their homeward journey to Huronia.

With Echon the Hurons were very pleased. He paddled the canoe and shouldered heavy burdens as well as any Indian brave. It was important to win the savages' respect on any journey for, as Brebeuf would one day write to inform future missionaries, "...the savages will retain the same opinion of you in their own country that they will have formed on the way...."

After they had navigated the Ottawa River, Lake Nipissing, the French River, and numerous smaller waterways in between, the weary travelers, having covered nine hundred miles in one month, finally arrived at the land of the Hurons.

The Huron villages offered a striking contrast to the crude, temporary dwellings Echon had seen while living with the nomadic Algonquins. A typical Huron settlement contained many well built cabins and was usually surrounded by a palisade fence. Each cabin or long-house, as it was called, was from thirty to ninety feet long and up to thirty feet wide. Constructed of poles lashed together and covered with bark, it curved up to a height of about twenty feet.

## **THE MISSION**

A monumental task confronted Father Brebeuf and those who would one day follow him to the Huron mission. Great obstacles had to be overcome before an effective apostolate could be launched.

First, the language barrier had to be broken down. This was quite a challenge to any European, especially since the Indians lacked a written language. Moreover, their words were uttered without the use of the lips and required voice inflection, as well as sound, to convey their proper meaning. To the untrained ear an Indian sentence resembled nothing more than a series of guttural grunts. Nor did they have words to describe abstract thoughts. This meant that the truths of the Faith would have to be taught in terms of material things alone. The Recollets had made remarkable progress in compiling a valuable list of Huron words and phrases – which gave Echon hope that, through perseverance, the language could be mastered.

Then, too, there were the problems of superstition, sorcery, promiscuity, war and cannibalism. It would require more than perseverance alone to deliver the savages from such evils.

When Father Daillon was recalled by his Superiors to Quebec in 1628, Father Brebeuf remained an entire year longer among the Hurons, becoming virtually an accepted member of the tribe. Despite the frantic opposition of the "medicine men," the saintly missionary aroused the interest of many of the savages in the one True God. As he became more fluent in the Huron language, he was able to speak at their councils, promising them happiness after death, if they were baptized.

But towards the end of his third year among the Hurons, Father Brebeuf's great hopes for the future were suddenly dashed. He received word that Quebec had been cut off from all supplies by an English fleet. The colony was on the verge of starvation and there was imminent danger of an English attack. He was ordered to return to Quebec as soon as possible. In obedience to his Superiors, Echon made immediate preparations for his departure. He was keenly disappointed that he had to leave the Hurons but he accepted the distressing news as the will of God. The seed of the Faith had been planted and he was certain that, in due season, it would bring forth fruit a hundredfold.

## **A BRIEF INTERRUPTION, 1629-1633**

By July, 1629, Father Brebeuf was back in Quebec, having brought with him a good supply of Huron corn for the starving colony. More than food was needed, however. Champlain's militia was far too small and ill-equipped to withstand an attack. The only alternative was to hand the settlement over to the English. With safe passage back to France promised to everyone in the colony, Champlain formally surrendered. The threat of starvation and of an English massacre were both over, but unfortunately, so were the present mission labors in New France. Heartbroken, Brebeuf and the other religious were forced to board English ships and to sail the great Atlantic home to France.

It was a bewildered and frustrated English General who found, upon returning to England, that his brilliant seizing of Quebec had come months after France and England had signed the Treaty of Susa. Thanks to Champlain, by the spring of 1632, an agreement had been reached allowing France to reoccupy Quebec.

Meanwhile, Father Brebeuf in the peace of his daily religious exercises at the College of Rouen, deepened his inner life through constant prayer and mortification. He also pronounced his final vows at this time, which made him until death a son of Saint Ignatius. He added to these solemn vows the oblation to Our Lord of everything he possessed, including life itself, if it so pleased God to accept it.

In 1633 he left France for the last time to commence again the labors he had been forced to abandon. The remaining sixteen years of his life would be spent in the arduous task of evangelizing the savages of New France.

## **RETURN TO THE MISSION**

At first Father Brebeuf was assigned to labor again among Quebec's neighboring savages, the Montagnais, and while his efforts failed to produce any tangible success, it gave the veteran missionary a chance to teach some of his new assistants the basics of the apostolate. One of the ablest young missionaries proved to be an intelligent, thirty-two-year-old Jesuit from Dieppe, FATHER ANTHONY DANIEL . Daniel had studied law before entering the Society of Jesus in 1621. He possessed the inherent qualities of faith, zeal, and humility, so essential for the formation of a good apostle...and a future martyr.

The discomforts of a long journey to Huronia, at this time, were a genuine test of patience for even the most virtuous among Brebeuf's companions. Thirty days of grueling travel were made especially tiresome by the constant insolence and cruelty inflicted on the Frenchmen by the extremely irritable savages, still half-sick from a recent epidemic of influenza.

With the completion of their cabin in the village of Ihonataria, the missionaries made more frequent attempts to teach their prospective converts the Faith. Their crude dwelling became also their temporary church, where often they would invite the villagers to assemble. These meetings were very important and Father Brebeuf wasted no words in his initial instruction. He Writes:

"We began our catechizing by this memorable truth, that their souls, which are immortal, all go after death either to paradise or to hell...I added that they had the choice during life, to participate after death in the one or the other-which one, they ought now to consider. Whereupon one honest old man said to me, "Let him who will, go to the fires of hell; I want to go to heaven!"; all the others followed, making use of the same answer, and begged us to show them the way...."

But years would elapse before the Hurons would sincerely accept “the way” of salvation. For two years, aside from the consolation of baptizing some of the Indian children and the dying, the missionaries had to be content with simply refuting the bizarre savage superstitious beliefs and explaining, as best they could, the true religion. Says Brebeuf, speaking of the mature Hurons, “They know the beauty of the truth, they approve of it, but they don’t embrace it.” Baptism, therefore, was wisely withheld from healthy adults unless the candidate was proved to be truly steadfast in the Faith and worthy of that holy sacrament.

The Indian children, however, were quite receptive to what the Blackrobes taught and soon competed with one another in answering catechism questions. The youngsters took a special liking to Father Daniel, who became their teacher. Daniel, known as Antwen, had made considerable progress in learning the Huron language and before long had produced a Huron translation of the Our Father, which many of the Indian children learned to recite. In 1636, Father Daniel returned to Quebec with six Huron lads, and established the first school for the instruction of Huron children in New France.

Father Brebeuf remained in Huronia tirelessly laboring as both priest and infirmarian for the inhabitants of Ihonataria and its neighboring villages. In the midst of his rigorous schedule, the saint somehow found time to record his experiences with the Hurons. It was a common requirement for Jesuit missionaries to write detailed reports about the people they evangelized and the significant events of their missions. These accounts, known as the Jesuit Relations, were often published to stimulate, among European readers, interest in and enthusiasm for the Jesuit foreign missions. Father Brebeuf’s writings, far from being merely historical or cultural documents, were packed with edifying meditations and practical advice for future missionaries to the Hurons. He concludes his Relation of July, 1636, with these thoughts:

“Jesus Christ is our true greatness; it is He alone and His Cross that should be sought in following after these people. For if you strive for anything else, you will find nothing but bodily and spiritual affliction. But having found Jesus Christ in His Cross, you have found the roses in the thorns, sweetness in bitterness, all in nothing.”

It was becoming more evident to Echon, at this time, that a very great cross and perhaps an unequaled obstacle in the path of converting the Hurons would be their fierce enemies, the Iroquois. Iroquois warriors had been making well-planned forays on unsuspecting villages, particularly in southern Huronia; but the entire Huron nation, including Ihonataria and other northern settlements, was in a state of alert and fear.

Neither native nor missionary was safe in Huron country. But in spite of such prevailing danger, Echon had resolved to remain with these Indians, cost what it may, to bring them to the knowledge of Truth.

## **AUGUST, 1636**

Father Brebeuf had not long to wait for the much-needed recruits he had been praying to receive. Within two years after his return to the Hurons he had five zealous priests laboring with him. Among those selected by the Jesuit superiors to be Echon’s assistants were two priests chosen also by God to be martyrs, Fathers CHARLES GARNIER and ISAAC JOGUES.

Charles Garnier, called Ouracha by the Indians, came to Huronia in August, 1636. The Parisian-born Jesuit was thirty years old at the time and had just been ordained the previous year. Although physically rather frail, Garnier was to survive fourteen years of exhausting mission efforts among the Hurons and the neighboring Petun tribe.

Isaac Jogues, a native of Orleans, was twenty-nine when he arrived at the Huron mission in September, 1636, a month after Garnier. Jogues had entered the Jesuit novitiate at seventeen and had become a professor of literature before being selected for the missions in Canada. His ordination preceded his departure for the New World by only two months. Ondessonk, as the Indians named him, was to become an intrepid pioneer who, in addition to working with the Hurons, would one day teach the gospel to tribes near Lake Superior and would also become the first apostle to the Iroquois.

Echon's new assistants were just getting acclimated to their surroundings in Huronia when the influenza flared up into epidemic proportions once again. The French had been spared, so far, from contracting the dreadful disease but they were apprehensive of losing this immunity. A few weeks after his arrival, Father Jogues fell very ill with the sickness. And soon, one by one, all the French, except Father Brebeuf, were stricken. Brebeuf nursed his patients without the benefit of medicines. Though some of them, including Father Jogues, were at death's door, all gradually began to recover after several weeks of confinement in their cabin. That none of the French perished with the contagion was clearly a miracle.

Once recovered, the Jesuits busied themselves in caring for the ailing savages. But the Fathers grew alarmed when the Indians, instead of expressing their gratitude, began to display signs of suspicion. The savages had been aroused by their sorcerers, who suspected that the Blackrobes had survived the illness because they were secretly practicing their own form of sorcery. The medicine men added to this accusation that the Blackrobes had caused the pestilence in the first place so that the French could thereby kill all of the Hurons and take their land.

Mysterious are the ways of God's Providence that He should allow the first years of this mission to coincide with the devastating malady which was afflicting the Huron nation. The Jesuits were undoubtedly confronted with problems as a result of the disease, but ultimately good was being derived from it.

Most important was the fact that the missionaries were populating heaven with the souls of the dying savages whom they baptized. Also, surrounded with death as they were, the Indians were less preoccupied with temporal concerns and more willing to listen to Echon and his fellow Blackrobes teach them about the eternity of happiness or misery that awaits all men after death.

Echon, during this period, was often allowed to address the Huron councils. He proposed that they abandon their superstitious practices and begin to obey the commandments of the "One-who-make-all." Even though the sorcerers continued viciously to oppose the Fathers, Echon, with his logic and eloquence, won many of the chiefs and elder Hurons, who at least verbally agreed to obey the commandments of the Blackrobe's God. Such promises, although encouraging, were by no means genuine conversions. For, while the savages longed for the joys of heaven and feared eternal hellfire, they still were not ready to accept the Catholic Faith nor its morality.

By the early months of 1637 the epidemic had greatly receded and with it the haranguing of the sorcerers and the suspicions of the other natives.

By the summer, significant progress was made in overcoming the superstitious misconception about the holy sacrament of Baptism. First, a prominent Huron, Tsiouendaentaha, a middleaged chief of Ihonataria, renounced all immoral and superstitious practices and asked to be received into the Faith of the Blackrobes. In June, without dropping dead on the spot, as many savages believed he would, he was baptized and given the

name Peter. Two months later, at Ossossane, a young chieftain about thirty-five years old, Chihwatenhwa, approached Echon and asked to be baptized. Father Brebeuf was astonished to find that Chihwatenhwa had but one wife and had been living a virtuous life separated from the feasts, orgies, and superstitious beliefs of the Indian world surrounding him. The new convert received the name Joseph. Both of these men became an edification to the missionaries and a source of great wonder to their fellow Hurons. They took their Faith very seriously. Father Brebeuf had anticipated for a long time the first fruits of the Huron mission, and at last they had been harvested.

## **NEW DANGERS**

The sweetness of these victories was short-lived, however, for by early autumn the influenza was again raging among the Hurons. This time those who suspected the cause of the disease to be the Jesuits exhibited outright hostility towards them. Father Brebeuf bade his companions to be ready for death at any moment and ordered a novena of Masses to be started in honor of Saint Joseph. He composed a letter to be sent to his Superior at Quebec. Dated October 28, 1637, it reads in part:

“We are perhaps upon the point of shedding our blood and of sacrificing our lives in the service of our good Master, Jesus Christ. It seem that His Goodness is willing to accept this sacrifice from me for the expiation of my great innumerable sins, and to crown from this hour forward the past services and the great and ardent desires of all our priests who are here....But we are all grieved over this, that these barbarians, through their own malice, are closing the door to the Gospel and to Grace.... Whatever conclusion they reach, and whatever treatment they accord us, we will try, by the Grace of Our Lord, to endure it patiently for His service. It is a singular favor that His Goodness gives us, to allow us to endure something for love of Him....”

That same day Echon, following an Indian tradition of feasting just prior to one's own death, invited the savages to his death banquet. The Jesuit residence was filled to capacity by a mob of hungry Hurons, who glutted themselves with *sagamite* while Echon chanted his death song in the Huron tongue. He vividly depicted the eternal joys of the blessed in heaven and the torments of the damned in hell: a death chant the savages had never heard before. The Indians were moved by this convincing presentation and departed from the feast with contented stomachs but troubled minds. Suddenly, their condemnation of the Blackrobes had become indecisive.

The Fathers, knowing that any display of fear on their part would be a sign of guilt, went about their duties in the village as if no serious dangers existed. They were neither molested nor threatened in any way. In fact, when the novena to Saint Joseph was completed a week later, a tranquillity pervaded Huronia, which even the savages could not help but notice. The Blackrobes marveled at God's protection and the powerful intercession of their faithful guardian, Saint Joseph.

Within a few months, the epidemic had finally subsided and cases of harassment had become rare. Any such incidents were usually the act of crazed sorcerers rather than of dangerous mobs. Moreover, some of the Huron chiefs, intrigued by the mysteries of the Catholic Faith, began to invite the Blackrobes to councils for the sole purpose of discussing religion. Eager to advance the message of salvation, the Blackrobes, in turn, held special feasts wherein they preached to throngs of savages. Although most of the listeners came as a result of curiosity, a small but noticeable element, including chiefs and elders, was becoming genuinely interested in what the missionaries had to say. Before long, a few of the Hurons at Ossossane' were asking the Blackrobes for private instructions in the Faith, and the number of adult baptisms began to increase.

### **A GROWING APOSTOLATE**

This unexpected turn of events at Ossossane' encouraged Echon to extend missions to other Huron settlements. Echon had often petitioned to be relieved of the great responsibility of being Superior, preferring the life of a simple missionary. Besides, with the pioneer days of the mission drawing to a close, he humbly urged that a more qualified leader should be sent to command the mission. Brebeuf was therefore quite pleased when Father Jerome Lalemant was appointed to succeed him as Superior in August, 1638.

Lalemant was the uncle of the future martyr, GABRIEL LALEMANT, who would join the Jesuits in New France ten years later. The new Superior was a zealous missionary and an able administrator. While he depended much on the invaluable advice of the veteran Brebeuf, Lalemant brought with him to the missions a few innovations.

The Jesuits had always had laymen to help them with the manual labor in their missions, but under Lalemant's direction a new force of devoted volunteers emerged, called *donnes*, or *oblates*. Bound by promises of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but not by the religious vows of the Society, the *donnes* became a tremendous asset, for in addition to offering their talents as domestic laborers they became auxiliary catechists and missionaries. Lalemant also introduced the idea of building a French station apart from all Huron villages which could serve as the mission's headquarters. This first exclusively French settlement in Huronia was called Mission Sainte Marie.

### **HARDSHIPS INCREASE**

War with the Iroquois, and disease, however, were taking their toll on the Huron people. A census taken by the Jesuits revealed that the thirty-two Huron villages were then inhabited by approximately twenty thousand Indians, a drastic decline from the estimated population of over thirty thousand just four years earlier. In September, 1639, another epidemic arose in the midst of the suffering Huron nation. This time it was the dreadful smallpox. Within weeks the contagious disease spread to almost every Huron village, leaving hundreds dead in its wake.. The Fathers were consequently suspected, threatened, and even expelled from every village they visited.

Brebeuf and all the Jesuit priests in New France sensed that the hardships borne by them thus far were but a foretaste of the still greater sufferings which were to come. "We have sometimes wondered," writes Lalemant, "whether we could hope for the conversion of this country without the shedding of blood...." For in the words of the ancient axiom, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church." And indeed the years of the Huron mission, filled as they were with extraordinary sacrifices, were as so many steps along the Way of the



Cross, leading the Jesuit missionaries up the mount of Calvary, where a chosen few among them would shed their blood in imitation of Our Lord.

### **ERA OF MARTYRDOM BEGINS**

By 1642 the Huron Mission was practically reduced to destitution. The Fathers were in need of medicines, clothing, vestments, and altar necessities. Even food was scarce, due to a lack of rain and a poor harvest. An expedition would have to be sent to Quebec to obtain the necessary supplies. Father Isaac Jogues was chosen to lead the company of five Frenchmen and eighteen Hurons on this dangerous journey. The excursion was especially perilous because of the increasing number of Iroquois war parties which had been recently encountered along the Saint Lawrence River. The little convoy departed in June and, in spite of the hazards, safely arrived at Quebec a month later.

It was early August when the heavily packed canoes were finally ready to be navigated back to Sainte Marie. The returning party was comprised of about thirty-five Hurons, under the leadership of the Christian Chief Eustace Ahatsistari, as well as Father Jogues, several French workmen, and a *donne'* named RENE GOUPIL. Goupil was only a year younger than Father Jogues, thirty-four at this time, and originally a native of Anjou. He had been received into the Jesuit novitiate in his youth, but was forced to leave the Order because of illness. Upon recovering his health, Goupil offered his services as a *donne'* and had been serving the mission in Quebec for the past two years. His assistance was now desired in Huronia, for he was a good nurse and a skillful surgeon.

The first day of the return trip passed by safely, but on the second day war whoops and musket fire suddenly split the air. The Iroquois sprang up from the cover of the tall grass, bombarding the flotilla with lead balls and arrows. The Hurons shouted back cries of defiance. The brave who piloted Father Jogues' canoe crashed it against the shore and the priest was catapulted into a thicket of high weeds, wherein he discovered he could conceal himself from the sight of the enemy.

Meanwhile, other canoes had hit the coast. In the open field stretching out before him Jogues could see Eustace and Rene', plus a handful of Huron braves, preparing to do battle hand-to-hand against twice as many Mohawks. Suddenly shouts from the coast announced the arrival of about seven enemy canoes from which leaped forty more whooping savages. The Hurons fought valiantly but the number of the enemy was overpowering.

Jogues still had not been detected. He could easily escape if he dashed for the woods. But, how could he flee? His friend Rene' was a captive; he might be tortured and killed. Not only Rene', but so many Christian Hurons and unbaptized Hurons who had been taken would need his priestly help. No, his people needed him; there were souls to be saved. Jumping up from his hiding place, Father Jogues waved his arms high in the air and shouted words of surrender. He was then apprehended and beaten by a Mohawk brave and soon found himself with the other prisoners. Falling upon the neck of Goupil, Jogues assured him, with tears, that this tragedy would be for the glory of God.

### **MOHAWK PRISONER**

Not many days after, the hungry and aching captives were exultantly displayed to a band of two hundred or so Mohawk braves, who met the returning war party on an island in lake Champlain (northeastern New York).

When the canoes landed, the howling barbarians danced about in sheer frenzy, slashing the prisoners with their knives and tearing at their flesh with their long fingernails. Then, picking up knotty clubs and thorn-studded rods, they formed two parallel lines up the slope of the hill ascending from the beach.

One by one the captives were forced to run between the columns of club-swinging brutes who delighted in nearly pounding their victims to death. This was the traditional Indian “welcoming committee” for prisoners of war. It was known as “running the gauntlet.” Jogues was put last in line. He was a special guest; for him was reserved the worst punishment. With head bent low he darted wildly through the mass of swinging cudgels. Blows fell hard and painful on his head, back, neck, and arms, while his sides ached from the sting of the thorny rods being slapped into his flesh and tearing it to pieces. He stumbled to the ground stunned, and they had to drag his unconscious body the rest of the way up the hill.

When he regained his senses, some of the tormentors burnt his arms and legs with a torch; others dug their fingernails into his wounds. Someone then took this thumb and crunched it between his teeth with such ferocity that he tore the skin to shreds, exposing the crushed bone. The failing priest was so weak that he could scarcely stand. His fellow prisoners, twenty-one in all, had likewise been so mercilessly tortured, that many of them were half-dead. But the captives could not be killed; for they had not as yet been triumphantly paraded before the entire Iroquois nation.

With little rest and no food, they were hastened along the trail to the land of the Mohawks. While enduring such torments Father Jogues was not altogether bereft of consolation, for along the way he was able to baptize some of his pagan Huron companions.

Rene’ Goupil, at this time, expressed his desire to extend his promises as a *donne’* to the perpetual vows of a religious. His profession was joyfully received and blessed by Father Jogues, who marveled at Rene’s constancy and holiness. When Jogues suggested that Rene’ attempt to escape, his counsel was in vain. Goupil replied pleadingly, “Allow me to die with you, my Father, for I cannot desert you.”

### **THE TORTURES CONTINUED**

After eighteen days the agonizing procession at last reached the Mohawk village of Ossernenon (Auriesville, New York). Again the prisoners were subjected to the knives of vicious braves and the nails of seething squaws who sliced and dug at their festering wounds. Father Jogues was considered the most detestable of them all. He was a Blackrobe, and their Dutch neighbors had warned them to beware of these French priests. They were “sorcerers.” The Protestant Hollanders warned them particularly about a certain sign these men often made with their right hands...a certain movement that resembled the shape of a cross. The bloodthirsty villagers vied with one another in crunching Father Jogues’ fingers in their mouths, macerating them pitiable, and tearing out the only two fingernails that remained to him.

Again the two familiar lines formed and the prisoners were forced to run the gauntlet. Jogues watched in horror as poor Rene’ ran clumsily into the cruel pathway standing straight up and leaving his head pitifully unprotected. Goupil fell senseless to the ground, his face drenched in blood from the thudding blows that met him full force. Jogues, who knew better how to protect himself, tore through the fray with his head bent low between his arms, but in the end his bald head was a mass of bloody welts.

Atop the summit of the hill the poor victims were burned and lacerated one by one. A Christian Algonquin woman was compelled to saw off Father Jogues' left thumb with an oyster shell. Even at night they were not left alone. While the professional rackers snored away, the little children approached the prisoners and dropped burning coals and faggots on their bare bodies stretched out on the ground and bound by stakes.

The captives were next marched to the neighboring village of Andagaron (Randall, New York); then on to Tionontoguen (Sprakers, New York), and tortured in much the same manner.

Not long after, a council was held to determine the fate of the prisoners. The Huron braves, of course, were to be tortured and killed. However, the chiefs decided to spare the white men, intending to return with them as hostages to Quebec. The Mohawk chieftains knew how much the French revered their Blackrobes. Ondessonk and the others would provide considerable bargaining power.

In a bitter agony of soul Father Jogues stood by and watched the horrible slaughter of his Huron children. Many had been exemplary Christians for a number of years; some were just recently baptized. He had begotten them all in Christ. "...While each one suffered but his own pain," Jogues wrote later, "I suffered that of all. I was afflicted with a great anguish, great as one may believe the heart of a most loving parent is afflicted when he sees the suffering of his own children." Eustace Ahatsistari was sentenced to die in another village. Those who witnessed his end said that all the while he was being tormented he prayed aloud for his persecutors. Several blows from a hatchet severed his head, thus sending to God a most noble and valiant soldier of Jesus Christ.

## **FIRST MARTYR**

It was nothing short of a miracle that Father Jogues and Rene' Goupil ever recovered from their wounds, but in a few weeks, though scarred and maimed, they were once more on their feet and somewhat stronger.

Though free to move about the village and visit the longhouses, the two Jesuits had to avoid any action that would irritate their captors. To Jogues such carefulness was second nature, but Goupil was too open in his devotions. He was seen once by a superstitious old warrior making the Sign of the Cross over the old man's grandson. One evening Father Jogues and Rene' went outside the palisades of the village to pray the Rosary. As they were returning, two braves suddenly drew near and gruffly ordered them to go back to the village.

"Walk ahead," growled one of the tall warriors as he motioned with his finger to Ondessonk. Father Jogues took a few steps and turned around. He saw the Iroquois draw out a tomahawk from beneath his blanket. Instantly the savage swung it high in the air and brought it down with a crash into the head of Goupil. Rene' staggered a step and calling out, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!" he fell to the ground. Two more vicious blows from a crimsoned hatchet extinguished the last breath of life in Rene' Goupil.

It was the 29th day of September, the feast of Saint Michael the Archangel, when this heroic young man went to his eternal reward. Truly, he died a martyr, a martyr for the Cross of Christ, for it was precisely because he was so eager to display the sacred sign of our Redemption that life was taken. Father Jogues knelt beside the body of his friend and pronounced the words of absolution. He was certain that Rene' was already in paradise.

The next morning the fearless priest strode out of the village in search of the body of his martyred brother, despite numerous threats that he himself would be killed if he ventured a foot outside the palisades. With the help of an Algonquin slave he found what was left of Rene's body dumped in the grass of a ravine. He

reverently picked up the holy remains and buried them underneath some stones in a stream, intending soon to return and give them a more decent burial.

But upon revisiting the spot he could not find the blessed body of Rene' and soon learned that young Iroquois braves had taken the body and dragged it to the forest nearby. In the spring, Father Jogues found Rene's fractured skull and some of his bones. These he reverently kissed and buried beneath the trunk of a tree.

### **FATHER JOGUES ESCAPES**

As Ondessonk was being dragged from one village to another during his long and weary enslavement, he conducted himself exactly as he had done among the Hurons. Every day he would enter the longhouses in search of the sick that he might win them to the Faith before they died. True, he had to perform his apostolic labors cautiously, but before long he had managed, under God's protection, to baptize seventy dying Mohawks. This afforded him great consolation.

In all, Father Isaac Jogues endured thirteen months of this tenuous ambassadorship. A source of wonder to the "Reformed" Church Dutchmen who settled at Fort Orange (Albany, New York) not far away, the Blackrobe often tried to explain to their disbelieving ears that he sought nothing for himself among the Indians. To their offers to aid him in escaping he simply said, "No." He had been sent to them by God to preach the gospel, the very gospel which was being abandoned by so many millions in Europe who had left the Apostolic Faith of their ancestors to embrace the libertine creed of Luther or the fatalistic views of Calvin.

However, conditions changed. An Iroquois war party returned to Ossernenon after suffering another humiliating defeat from the French. Providentially, Jogues was away on a fishing expedition at the time, or he would have been killed instantly. When the expedition stopped to trade at the Dutch settlement of Rensselaerswyck, he learned there about the French victory. Jogues also found out that sentence had been passed against him at Ossernenon and that as soon as he returned he would be tortured and killed. Father Isaac was not afraid to die, in fact he longed for martyrdom. However, he began prayerfully to reconsider the pleas of the Hollanders that he escape. What purpose would his death serve at this time? The Christian Hurons were either dead or scattered far and wide as slaves of Iroquois families. These Hurons were protected now by Indian law; no one but their masters could kill them. Rene' was dead. Surely, if he broke away, he could return to the Iroquois at a later date to convert them when conditions were more favorable. Jogues concluded that the Will of God lay in this course....only he must be quick about it, for he was running out of time!

One August night he slowly got up from between two snoring copper-skinned guards, tip-toed out the door of the barn wherein they were sleeping, and ran like a deer for freedom. During this escape Father Jogues was bitten in the leg by a ferocious mastiff, and while the tortures of the Mohawks hadn't killed this holy man, the vicious dog bite nearly did. Due to improper medical treatment, in a few weeks the priest's entire leg would swell alarmingly and gangrene would set in. A skilled surgeon finally saved Father Jogues' life and his leg by performing, just in the nick of time, a most painful operation.

When the Mohawks discovered that their prisoner was gone, they flew into a rage. They threatened the Dutch that they would burn down their homes and slaughter everyone in them if Ondessonk were not returned. Throughout the crisis Joques lay concealed in a stuffy attic of an old storekeeper's shop. The settlers were extremely afraid of what the Mohawks might do, but thanks to the courage of their commandant, Arendt Van Corlaer, the French Jesuit was not given back to the enraged savages. Eventually the furor of the Indians

subsided after they had been many weeks searching about the settlement with no success. It was a sheer miracle that Father Jogues was never discovered.

Hearing of the plight of the Jesuit priest, the Governor of New Amsterdam (new York City), William Kiefe, ordered Van Corlaer to send the refugee down to him immediately. This being done, the kind-hearted Governor made arrangements for Jogues' passage back to Europe. Aboard a tiny vessel, Father Jogues went forth across the Atlantic. He could hardly believe that after seven years among the Indians he was on his way home to France.

It was Christmas Day, 1643, when the poorly clad missionary again set foot on his native soil. The inhabitants of the little fishing village in lower Brittany, where he landed, showed him great hospitality. With the assistance of a kind merchant who offered Father Jogues a horse, the blessed Jesuit was soon on the road to Rennes, where the college of the Society of Jesus was located. Before sunrise on January 5th he knocked at the door of the college, knowing it to be the hour for the community Mass. He was still dressed in peasant's garb, with a sorry hat perched atop his scarred head, The porter eyed him suspiciously. Jogues merely identified himself as a "poor man" from Canada and asked if he might please speak to the rector. Father Rector had been vesting for Mass. However, he was anxious to receive news from the Fathers in Canada, and fearing that the man might leave if he were asked to wait, he took off his alb and came to the door. He invited the "poor man" into the parlor. It was still dark and they spoke by the light of a candle. "

"Is it true that you have come from Canada?" the rector asked.

"Yes," the unseemly looking visitor answered.

"Do you know Father de Brebeuf?"

"Extremely well," he said.

"And Father Jogues, did you know Father Isaac Jogues?"

"I knew him very well indeed," replied the stranger.

"Is he still alive?" questioned the rector, his voice stiffening "Have those barbarians not murdered him?"

"He is at liberty," the poor man assured him with a hesitant gasp. "Reverend Father," Jogues burst into tears, "it is he who speaks to you,"

Soon all of France was talking about this missionary priest, a prisoner of savages. His story was the daily topic of conversation. People vied with one another to meet him, to ask him questions, to receive his blessing, to kiss his mangled hands. The Queen regent herself, Anne of Austria, received him as an honored guest, and with tears in her eyes, asked him to relate what he had suffered. Then she examined with devotion his mutilated fingers. Father Jogues was granted special permission by Pope Urban VIII to say Mass, despite his missing fingers. The Pontiff stated, "It is unbecoming that a martyr of Christ should not drink the blood of Christ."

Such publicity was too much, however, for the genuine humility of the holy apostle. He longed to be back among the Indians. The children of the North American forests had staked a claim to his heart and he could not rest until he had won them all for Christ. Consequently, after only a three-month stay in his own country, he was allowed to embark for New France once more. "I go, but I shall never come back again, " were his words on the eve of his departure.

In June, 1644, he stepped ashore at Quebec and received a tumultuous welcome from his thoroughly astonished and overjoyed fellow Jesuits.

### **DISTRESS IN NEW FRANCE**

Jogues quickly learned the sad state of affairs to which the missions in New France had declined.

In August, 1644 the Jesuits sought to slip through the enemy-infested waterways and trails with the needed supplies for Mission Sainte Marie in Huronia. Father John de Brebeuf volunteered to head this risky expedition. Since his return from the Huron in 1641, Echon had been given charge of the Christian Indian settlement at Sillery, near Quebec. All the while, this pioneer of the Huron mission was anticipating the day when he could labor again among the Wyandot people, and at last the opportunity had arisen. A virtuous, thirty-one year old Jesuit, FATHER NOEL CHABANEL, would accompany Brebeuf on this his third and final journey to the Hurons. Chabanel had arrived in New France the preceding year. he found it very difficult to learn even a little of the Indian languages, and thought it impossible to become accustomed to the crude Indian life and manner. Yet he did his best to conceal these repugnances, and privately vowed to remain the rest of his life among the savages of New France, a vow he would one day seal with his blood.

In some villages there were now more Christians than heathens, for gradually Huronia was becoming a Catholic nation. If granted a period of peace, the entire Huron people would have accepted the Faith.

But it is reserved only for the secret and adorable judgments of God to know why the wartorn Hurons were denied this desired tranquillity. The Iroquois' bloody campaign to conquer the Hurons continued,. With more frequent and forceful raids they not only attacked Huron convoys and hunting parties, but even boldly advanced into Huron country plundering several villages there. The intrepid Jesuits, renewed with a greater zeal upon Ehcon's return to Huronia, remained at their stations, exhorting and teaching the Indians regardless of the impending dangers.

### **MISSION OF PEACE**

The summer of 1645, however, kindled a spark of hope for the despairing Hurons. Not all was shining brightly for the Iroquois nation. Endless war was sapping the strength of the tribes, as even their victories were costly in manpower.

A mission of good will to Mohawk country could strengthen the existing agreements and might even induce the other Iroquois tribes to enter into the negotiations. Father Jogues, who had been praying to be sent back to the place of his former captivity, with the approval of the Jesuit superiors, was selected by the Governor to carry out this important assignment. In view of its dangerous circumstances the venture was placed under the patronage of all the Holy Martyrs.

On the sixteenth of May, 1646, Jogues, in civilian garb, a French layman, two Algonquins, and four Mohawk guides set out on the journey. They arrived in the early part of June, causing much excitement in the Mohawk villages. A great multitude gathered to see the ambassadors, and those who had once made life so miserable for Ondessonk, now pretending to have forgotten the past, greeted him cordially.

Memories crowded Father Jogues' mind: the excruciating pain of the gauntlet, the agony of the torture platform...and the death of Rene' Goupil. As soon as the opportunity presented itself, he visited the ravine to venerate Rene's sacred remains.

A general assembly of the sachems, or chiefs, was held to greet the ambassadors. Speeches of benevolence were delivered, and belts of wampum and furs exchanged. The council ended favorably and before his departure Father Jogues administered the sacraments to the Christian captives, and baptized many savages who were dying.

Having completed the mission of diplomacy, Father Jogues and his companions then made the long journey back to Quebec, arriving on the third of July.

#### **MARTYRDOM OF ISAAC JOGUES AND JOHN DE LALANDE**

After two months, in August 1646, the Hurons began gradually to appear in increasing numbers at Three Rivers. In September they held council with Governor Montmagny, who expressed his desire that they also send emissaries of peace to the Mohawks. The Hurons agreed to the proposal and asked if Father Jogues could accompany them.

Jogues was soon notified of the Huron request and met with his Superior and the Governor at Three Rivers. The zealous Jesuit was overjoyed and profoundly grateful that God had so quickly answered his prayers. Without hesitation he voiced his desire to revisit the Mohawks, only this time not merely as a French delegate in civilian dress, but as a Catholic missionary in his religious cassock. Despite the obvious danger involved, he received both the Governor's unqualified permission and his Superior's paternal blessing for the undertaking.

On September 24, 1646 the pious priest accompanied by a young *donne'*, JOHN DE LALANDE , and several Hurons embarked on the journey. Except for one, the Hurons abandoned the perilous venture.

They had nearly reached Ossernenon, in mid-October, when the anticipated hazards became realities. A Mohawk war party, on its way to attack the French, captured Father Jogues' little company of three. They were stripped of clothing, brutally beaten with fists and clubs and hurried along the trail to the Iroquois village. The peace had been reneged by the Mohawk Bear clan.

But why, asked Ondessonk, had the savages become so violent and bloodthirsty? He found that the Iroquois were obsessed with the idea that he was an evil sorcerer and that the black box which he had left, containing his vestments and religious articles, had cast a curse on them. For shortly after Father Jogues' departure in June, a contagious disease had killed many in their villages and, in addition to this, a swarm of worms had destroyed almost their entire harvest. The sorcerers had thrown Ondessonk's black box, unopened, into the river. They then stirred up bitter hatred against the paleface who, they alleged, was seeking revenge on the Iroquois for having once tortured him.

In the almost deserted village of Ossernenon, meanwhile, a small violent group of the Bear clan secretly plotted to kill the captives before any decision could be reached by the council. They cunningly sought out Ondessonk and invited him to enjoy a meal at their lodge. To refuse an invitation was a grievous offense. He placed his confidence totally in Divine Providence, and courageously proceeded to the Bear cabin. As he lifted the door flap and stooped to enter the lodge, an assailant within raised his hatchet. An Iroquois who had accompanied Father Jogues tried to ward off this assault, but a fierce blow sliced the protector's arm and

struck the head of the saintly priest, felling him to the ground. In an instant, the martyrdom of Father Isaac Jogues had been completed. The Group of murderers immediately cut off his head and stuck it on one of the palisade posts of the village. His venerable body was then thrown into the Mohawk River.

From the exultant cries of the warriors John de Lalande suspected what had happened. Shortly, word was brought to the Wolf cabin where John had remained....Father Jogues was dead. The young donne' prayed for the strength he needed to likewise suffer whatever God willed him to endure. he longed to search for the blessed martyr's body before it was completely mutilated or lost, but while in the custody of his sympathetic Iroquois guards, this was for the moment impossible.

When the evening's clamor had subsided and all in his lodge were asleep, John silently made his way out the door to find his beloved Father Isaac. But his first step from the cabin was his last step toward eternity. An awaiting savage of the Bear clan split his head with a mighty stroke of his tomahawk. His head was cut off and placed on the palisade next to Father Jogues' and his body was also thrown into the river.

News of the martyrdoms did not reach Quebec until some eight months later, in June of 1647. While the Fathers received the reports with sorrow, they also had reason to be thankful, for they now had two more advocates praying for them in heaven.

### **MARTYRDOM OF ANTHONY DANIEL**

In June 1648, FATHER ANTHONY DANIEL came up to Sainte Marie from Teanaustaye in order to spend some time in retreat, observing the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius. He and John de Brebeuf were the oldest missionaries in the field and also the most revered by the Indians. Echon and Antwen, as Father Daniel was called by his Huron children, had been the closest of friends and both of them cherished their infrequent reunions as foretastes of those celestial greetings to come.

Having refreshed himself spiritually, Father Daniel was anxious to return to his mission, and so on July 2nd he took leave of his fellow laborers at Sainte Marie and struck out on the lonely trail back to Saint Joseph's or Teanaustaye.

Two days later, at night, a panting wide-eyed runner entered Sainte Marie shouting dreadful news. Teanaustaye was in flames! Antwen had been murdered!

Brebeuf slipped silently into the chapel to pour out his heart to God. He had had a premonition as he bade adieu to his friend two days before that he would never see him again in this life. Daniel had been taken by God. Father de Brebeuf prayed now that he too might be found worthy to suffer a similar death. In the next few days, after questioning the survivors, Echon was able to piece together the frightful story:

Only fifteen hundred people were in the village when Daniel returned. Most of these were women and children. The majority of the men either had gone to trade at Three Rivers or were out hunting the Iroquois in war parties.

At the same time, a force of six hundred Senecas had silently approached the outskirts of the village, where under the cover of darkness they lay concealed awaiting the rising of the sun.

Father Daniel had just finished celebrating Mass and, clad in white alb and a red stole, he was expounding to the faithful the joys of paradise awaiting those who die in the state of grace, when a shout interrupted his



discourse, "The Iroquois!" Suddenly, blood-curdling cries sounded on the periphery of the village. It was the Iroquois war whoop. Terror-stricken squaws shrieked in horror as they ran frantically past Antwen who had raced out of the chapel. The Huron braves, disastrously outnumbered, grabbed their tomahawks and bows and hurled themselves into the battle.

Father Daniel dashed into the melee shouting words of absolution toward all the Faithful. Then he encouraged everyone who could to escape while there was still time. "Flee, my children, and bear with you your Faith even to your last breath." They in turn pleaded with their Father to go with them, and hurry! "No," he called back, "I shall die here to save you; we shall see one another again in heaven!" Turning to a few who were too old to follow the others, he said, "My brothers, my sisters, today we shall be in paradise. Believe this and hope that God may love you forever."

The enemy had just broken through the gates and their eerie shrieks grew louder. Father Daniel could see the savages now, bands of them, painted crimson-red and waving their bloody tomahawks as they overtook and slaughtered everyone before them.

He must do something to distract them so that the fleeing Hurons would have time to escape to the forest. The fearless priest took hold of a crucifix and held it high in the air. Then, without flinching, he walked majestically towards them. The rampaging Iroquois halted, stupefied. Who was this white-clad man threatening them with a cross? Was it an apparition? Suddenly one of them shouted recognition: "The BLACKROBE!" With that, a musket ball was dispatched piercing the heart of Father Daniel, while several arrows were shot into his face and neck. His head was scalped and slivers of his flesh eaten by the murderous cannibals in the hope that they might inherit his courage. Then they set fire to his chapel and threw the desecrated body of the courageous priest into the raging inferno. With the swiftness of light the priestly soul of Father Anthony Daniel took its flight into the vision of God.

The brutal conquerors whirled through the burning village splitting the heads of the old, the lame, and the sick, and herded off nearly seven hundred prisoners to the south, mostly women and children. In no time at all, the entire mission of Saint Joseph's at Teanaustaye was a heap of ashes. Between four and five hundred people had been slain.

## **A NEW APOSTLE**

In January 1649, a thirty-eight year old Jesuit arrived at Sainte Marie most eager to spend himself among the Indians. His name was GABRIEL LALEMANT and he was a nephew of Jerome Lalemant, the former Superior of the Huron mission.

This not too young priest was exuberant with joy when he heard that he had been appointed to be the assistant of Father John de Brebeuf, about whom he had heard so much.

Father Brebeuf, however, had misgivings about his new associate. He was small and frail; physically he wasn't cut out for the rigors of the frontier life. Yet,...he had an enthusiasm...a constant enthusiasm...like a giant ready to run the way! Perhaps, Brebeuf concluded, what flesh obviously couldn't supply, his spirit would. So, unto their mission the two priests went, side by side-and, what an amusing contrast they made!-the giant Echon and his little companion. The Hurons were quick to give the new Blackrobe a name. They called him Atironta.

## **THE MISSION ATTACKED**

On Monday, March fifteenth, John de Brebeuf and Gabriel Lalemant performed their usual priestly duties at the mission of Saint Louis and retired there for the night, intending to visit Saint Ignace, three miles to the south, the next morning after Mass.

When the night had run its course and the brightness of the sun was obliterating the last trace of darkness, three breathless braves raced into the mission screaming the dreaded news: "The Iroquois! They are in the new village! We alone have escaped! The Hotinonsionni are at your door!"

In a flash Stephen Annaotaha, the Christian chieftain, with stentorian commands began organizing the horrified warriors into their defenses, positioning them at the gates and palisades, while the two startled priests tried to calm the frantic women and shrieking children who were running to and fro in desperate confusion.

Suddenly, a spine-tingling "Wiiii!" pierced the ghastly silence-it was the Iroquois war whoop. With it poured out hundreds of painted savages from the concealing forest, recklessly charging the palisades and the main gate. The Hurons valiantly held their own but were greatly outnumbered.

Soon they were forced to surrender, and with them stood two odd-looking men with black beards and long black robes.

A sickening scene of carnage followed the victory as the conquerors ran through the mission splitting the skulls of the wounded and of those too old or sick to flee.

## **MARTYRDOM OF JOHN BREBEUF**

The prisoners were then beaten into file and roughly compelled to sustain a marching trot back to Saint Ignace. Upon their arrival at the site of what was to be their great citadel, the Iroquois "welcoming committee" hurried out to greet them. The captives were only too familiar with what awaited them. One by one they were made to run between two columns of savages who "caressed" their guests by pounding them with their knotty bludgeons.

The wounded and aching victims were then led by wild maniacs into the cabin of torture. Father Brebeuf had hoped that this very cabin would one day be a Huron church.

Right away, Echon and five Hurons were kicked to their feet and commanded to sing their death song. And what a death song Echon sang as he poured forth sweet hymns to his Savior in the Huron tongue! Then, like ferocious lions, the savages grabbed the hands of this white giant and chewed his fingers to shreds while they led him to a post. Dropping to his knees Brebeuf kissed the wooden column as if it were the Cross of Christ. Then his broken hands were tied to it.

Echon knew well their heathen code. If the torturers could force from their victims a cry for mercy, they were the victors; but if the sufferer defied them to the end, they lost. Sustained by the grace of God, the holy priest was not going to ask for mercy nor utter any cry of pain, ...indeed he would show no fear of them at all.

Revolving about in a satanic frenzy the braves began their sadistic orgy by placing burning sticks beneath Echon's feet so as to make him "dance." Flaming torches were then applied to his legs; one brave thrust a

firebrand around his neck and beneath his armpits. But throughout all this, Brebeuf remained as insensible as a tree. He was totally absorbed in God.

Furious that they could not wring from him a plea for mercy, they commenced slashing off pieces of his flesh. As he endured the awful pain Echon would bellow at the top of his lungs, "Jesus, taiteur!" ("Jesus, have mercy on us!") and the Hurons would answer, "Jesus, taiteur!" To keep him quiet they shoved flaming torches into his mouth. Then a collarbrand of green twine holding six red-hot hatchets was dropped over his head. As Echon struggled to fling the sizzling device from him, gleeful laughs rolled around the walls of the hellish dungeon until the rope burned through, dropping the glowing irons at his blistered feet. A belt of burning bark was then fastened around the priest's waist, making of him a human torch and enveloping him in smoke rising from his own roasting skin. The Iroquois gazed in awe, spellbound that one could endure so much without showing a sign of pain.

While the weary executioners rested from this inhuman work, Echon, in imitation of his Divine Master, prayed for his persecutors, that they who were inflicting upon him so many wounds might by these same wounds be themselves converted and healed.

Hearing the Blackrobe speak of holy Baptism and the joys of paradise, a former Christian Huron, who had betrayed both his people and his Faith, mockingly addressed himself to the saint: "Echon, ...you say that Baptism and the sufferings of this life head straight to paradise; you will go soon, for I am going to baptize you, and to make you suffer well, in order to go the sooner to your paradise." Having said this, the hateful apostate took a kettle of boiling water and poured it over Echon's head saying with bitter sarcasm, "Go to heaven, for you are well baptized." To which infliction the pitiful victim responded, "Jesus, taiteur!"

Such defiance was more than the proud Iroquois could take. A warrior rose up and taking his knife chopped off Brebeuf's nose; another carved off both his lips, and grabbing his tongue in his bloody hands, hacked off a large piece of it; after this, a third shoved a fiery brand up against his face, searing his mangled mouth. As he turned his bleeding head to heaven, his chest heaved a roaring, clean, but painfully guttural, "Jesus, taiteur!" These were the last words of Father John de Brebeuf.

His emaciated body lay silent now but his heart still beat. Though unconscious, his eyes were wide open and set fixedly upon his tormentors, still defying them, so they thought. Fearing this, an amazed brave closed them forever by prying them out with a flaming torch.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon on the sixteenth of March when the pure soul of Father John de Brebeuf left his mortal body to go to God. He was just nine days away from his fifty-ninth birthday.

### **MARTYRDOM OF GABRIEL LALEMANT**

Meanwhile, Father Lalemant and the other prisoners lay herded together. Knowing the fate of his companion he prayed to him now for strength, as he was certain Father Brebeuf was already in heaven. The torturers now were looking at him.

Yanked to his feet, the little priest was shoved violently to a post. He knelt before it and kissed it; for him as for Echon, it was as precious as the Cross of Christ. The spirit of John de Brebeuf had inflamed Atironta with courage and a heavenly peace radiated visibly from his face.

First he had to endure the torture of the fire and the burning torches; then his arms and legs were closed over red-hot axes. The pain was so excruciating that his whole body shivered, yet his jaws were locked and no cry escaped his lips. Instead he repeated the same prayer as Echon with a gusty bellow: "Jesus, taiteur!" Such strength they in no wise expected, especially from one so frail.

He, too, had to undergo the unholy baptism which the apostate Huron performed again so fiendishly,...his charred and blistering body collapsing into unconsciousness after the scalding hot water had run its scorching course. Regretfully, they had to leave him to recover lest he should die at night while Areskouï, their sun god, to whom they wished to offer their victim, was hiding.

During the night, Father Lalemant came to, and, feeling the pain of his wounds, he lifted his voice in prayer seeking relief in God. To silence him once and for all a brave tore out his tongue with a knife and thrust fiery faggots into his mouth. Still not satisfied, they plucked out his eyes and stuffed burning coals into the empty sockets; others hacked off his hands, searing the stumps with red-hot axes. The heartless wretches then retired for the rest of the night.

When the sun rose, the heart of Atironta was still very faintly beating,...just a few more breaths and then, for an extraordinary little priest, ...eternal bliss!

After the blackened and mutilated corpses of the priests were recovered from the ashes of Saint Ignace, they were carried back to Sainte Marie, cleansed, and vested in sacerdotal garments. They were laid out for one entire night side-by-side before the Blessed Sacrament. The next day, Sunday, the twenty-first of March, they were solemnly interred. "We buried these precious relics...with so much consolation and such tender feelings of devotion," related Father Ragueneau, "...that I know none who did not desire, rather than fear, a similar death...."

Afterwards, when alone, Father Ragueneau-now the Superior-thumbed through Father Brebeuf's spiritual diary. He came upon these words: "Two days in succession, I have felt in me a great desire for martyrdom and for enduring all the torments which the martyrs have suffered." Hereupon, with tear-filled eyes, the Superior recalled a conversation he had once had with him, during the course of which he asked Father Brebeuf if he would be afraid of the fire should the Iroquois ever capture him. "Oh, yes!" Father Brebeuf answered, "I would fear it if I regarded only my own weakness. The sting of a fly is capable of making me impatient. But I trust that God will help me. Aided by His grace, I do not fear the torments of fire any more than I fear the prick of a pin."

#### Martyrdoms of Charles Garnier and Noel Chabanel

At this time there were four Jesuits laboring among the Petuns to the southwest. Pre-eminent among them was Charles Garnier, who had devoted ten years to evangelizing that stiff-necked nation to Christ. Stationed in the same field were Noel Chabanel, who lived with Garnier in the southern village of Etarita, and Fathers Grelon and Garreau, who were staying at a village twelve miles north. Unwilling to risk the lives of any more priests unnecessarily, Father Raqueneau scribbled a hasty letter to Father Garnier commanding all four missionaries to return to Saint Joseph's at once unless some urgent reason detained them.

Father Garnier must have asked himself as he read the letter, what could be more urgent than the peril to which his young flock was now exposed? Yet there was no need of risking two lives. Father Chabanel was ordered to go back with some Huron refugees, and reluctantly but nobly, he obeyed.

On Tuesday, December seventh, just two days after Father Chabanel had departed, loud screams of terror shook the air as Father Garnier was making his usual rounds of the cabins: "The Iroquois! The Iroquois!" Dashing out into the open, the priest beheld scores of paintstreaked warriors storming through the gates. Many more were already running like madmen through the village, smashing skulls of isolated braves and massacring helpless women and children as they hewed their path of blood.

Father Garnier ran to his chapel exhorting all whom he saw, to flee: "Escape any way you can! Go quickly! Keep your Faith as long as you live!" As he was shouting this, he gave a general absolution to the Christians who quailed in horror about him. To their pleas that he escape with them he only waved a refusal; then he turned to face the pursuing invaders.

A musket fired once and the priest felt a sharp sting in his breast; then again, and another biting pain in his stomach, upon which the man of God dropped to the ground unconscious. Shortly afterwards his senses returned and, as if infused with superhuman strength, he rose to his feet. A man close by was writhing in his death agony. Garnier made a few pathetic steps towards him. Then he fell to his knees but continued dragging himself along in his own blood. At that moment an Iroquois brave pounced upon him, putting an end to this last surge of priestly zeal with two smashing blows from his tomahawk.

Meanwhile Father Chabanel was struggling through the woodlands trying to keep pace with the Christian Hurons in their flight to Saint Joseph's Isle. At a certain point in the journey he bade the Indians go on without him, unable as he was to keep up with them. His Christian children feared to leave him behind alone, but he insisted that they go ahead. "It makes no difference if I die," he said. "The Iroquois cannot rob me of the blessedness of paradise."

The good Father never did make it to the island. A certain renegade Huron brave, who was harboring in his heart a brewing hatred for the French and their religion, doubled back from the company unnoticed and confronted the unsuspecting priest alone near a stream. No one witnessed his foul crime, but the murderous apostate was heard later to boast that he had "rid the world of a carrion of a Frenchman, brained him at his own feet, and thrown his body into the river." The day of his death was December eighth, the feast of the Immaculate conception of the Blessed Virign Mary.

## **SEQUEL**

The remnant of the annihilated Huron confederacy dispersed in various directions seeking shelter. Some were taken in by the Petun and Neutral tribes; others journeyed as far as the western nation of the Eries, and about one thousand Hurons, mostly Christian, fled with the Jesuits to the second Fort Sainte Marie on Saint Joseph Island. The new Sainte Marie, which had been completed in November, 1649, proved to be no refuge at all. True, it offered adequate protection from Iroquois assaults but this dreaded enemy continued to massacre the Huron hunting and fishing parties which ventured forth from the confines of the Island. The French tried to feed as many of the Hurons as they could with the few supplies that they had, but it wasn't long before starvation and famine had set in. Hundreds of Hurons lost their lives during that torturous winter. In the spring of 1650 Sainte Marie was abandoned. The Jesuits, with what was left of their haggard flock, returned to Quebec where eventually the scattered remainder of the Huron people collected into reservations.

Thus ended the drama of the Huron mission, a mission which had terminated in apparent failure. It had been born, so to speak, with the arrival of Saint John de Brebeuf, and had died shortly after his martyrdom. But to

Brebeuf, who would have crossed “the great ocean to win one little soul for Our Lord,” and to his fellow martyrs, the sacrifices, the torments, and death itself had not been offered to God in vain. They had soared to the heights of sanctity by enduring all for the love of God and the salvation of souls. They had sown the seed of the Faith and had personally harvested an abundance of Indian souls for heaven. Having watered this seed with their own blood, their successors were to reap the first fruit of sanctity in North America, ironically enough in the person of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, the Lily of the Mohawks.

**THE EIGHT NORTH AMERICAN MARTYRS AND THEIR BIRTHDATES INTO ETERNITY:**

Saint Rene’ Goupil — September 29, 1642

Saint Isaac Jogues — October 18, 1646

Saint John de Lalande — October 19, 1646

Saint Anthony Daniel — July 4, 1648

Saint John de Brebeuf — March 16, 1649

Saint Gabriel Lalemant — March 17, 1649

Saint Charles Garnier — December 7, 1649

Saint Noel Chabanel — December 8, 1649

**PRAYER TO THE EIGHT NORTH AMERICAN MARTYRS**

(author unknown)

Let Us Pray

Protect our land, O heavenly patrons, which you have bedewed with the rich treasure of your blood. Watch over our Catholic Faith which you helped to establish in this new land. Bring all our fellow citizens to a knowledge and love of the truth. Make us zealous in spreading abroad a knowledge of Catholic teachings, so that we may continue and perfect the work which you have begun with so much labor and suffering. Pray for our homes, our schools, our missions; for vocations, for the conversion of sinners, the return of those who have wandered from the fold, and the perseverance of all the faithful. Amen.