

# **The Canadian Martyrs**

## Jesuits and Laymen

Catechetical Activity

Ages 9-11

## The Canadian Martyrs

**Materials Needed:** The Canadian Martyrs biographies (pages 3-5), copies of the activity sheet (1 per child), pencils, pencil crayons

### Gathering:

1. Have the group gather around and sit quietly for a few moments.
2. Ask the children if they have ever heard of a 'martyr' before. If so, allow them to share what they know about martyrdom.
3. When they have finished sharing their ideas, talk to the children about what a martyr is - someone who is killed because of their religious beliefs. Explain that many many years ago, in some parts of the world, it was against the law to be a Christian. And although it was illegal, many Christians kept their strong faith and were proud of their relationship with God. Sometimes, they were killed because of their religious beliefs - making them martyrs.

### Listening:

1. Read the biography of the Canadian Martyrs to the children. You may find it beneficial to paraphrase some parts.
2. Talk to the children about how some of the martyrs had 'consciously embraced the perspective of martyrdom'. What does that mean? And why do they think some of the martyrs were at peace with that possibility? (Ex. strong faith, trust in God, felt that it was their calling, etc.)

### Doing:

1. Ask the children to imagine that they are going to teach someone younger than them about what a martyr is. Have the children complete the handout on page 6 with information that will help a younger child understand what a martyr is.
2. If necessary, allow the children to work with a partner so they can brainstorm information together. Encourage the children to decorate their handout if time permits.

### Going:

1. Read the prayer on page 7 aloud to the group.

**The Canadian Martyrs**  
**Feast Day: September 26<sup>th</sup>**

**Their Lives**

Eight French missionaries became martyrs in North America in the 17th century, six Jesuits and two "*donnés*", laymen who served the Jesuits. Three were killed at Ossernenon, today's Auriesville, near Albany, New York. Five were killed in Huron territory, about 150 km north of Toronto.

The layman René Goupil had come to New France in 1640 as a *donné* (he was not bound to the Society of Jesus by religious vows, but by a contract to help the missionaries). He was with Father Isaac Jogues and about 40 Hurons when the group was attacked on Lake St-Pierre in the St. Lawrence River by Iroquois. Father Jogues was taken prisoner and killed in Iroquois territory. René Goupil was killed at Ossernenon on September 29, 1642.

Father Jogues was eventually held prisoner in Manhattan. With the help of the Dutch, he escaped and made his way to France and back to New France. On September 24, 1646, with the lay *donné* Jean de la Lande he left Trois-Rivières on a mission to evangelize the Iroquois. They were met with hostility when they arrived at Ossernenon because the Iroquois blamed the Blackrobes for the epidemic that had killed many people in their village. Father Jogues was killed on October 18, 1646. Jean de la Lande was killed the very next day.

Father Antoine Daniel grew up in Dieppe, France, and arrived in Quebec City in 1633 where, for seven years, he was the director of a school for young Hurons. Then he went to Huronia with Father Jean de Brébeuf. On July 4, 1648, the Iroquois attacked their residence at Ste-Marie-among-the-Hurons (near today's Midland, Ontario) and Father Daniel was killed as he was celebrating Mass.

Father Jean de Brébeuf came from Normandy. He arrived in Quebec in 1625 and spent his first winter in the bush with Montagnais hunters in order to study their way of life. He was in Huronia from 1626 to 1629 and again from 1634 until his death. He and his fellow Jesuit Father Gabriel Lalement were caught in a surprise attack in a village they had named St. Louis, and taken to another one they called St. Ignace, where they were killed, Brébeuf on March 16, 1649. Father Lalement had arrived in Quebec in 1646. He had been in Huronia six months when he was killed on March 17, 1649.

Charles Garnier was born in 1605 or 1606 in Paris. He came to Quebec in 1636 and went immediately to Huronia, where he lived for the rest of his life. In 1647, he was sent to live on the

edge of Huron territory, in a village the Jesuits had named St. John. It was attacked by Iroquois raiders in March 1649. During another attack, on December 7 the same year, while he was helping the wounded, Father Garnier was shot and killed. His companion, Father Noël Chabanel, had arrived in Quebec in 1643. While he was en route to safety on Christian Island after the December 7 attack, he stopped in exhaustion and was killed by a Huron apostate on December 8.

The Canadian martyrs were canonized on June 29, 1930, by Pope Pius XI. In 1940, Pope Pius XII declared them to be secondary patrons of Canada, after St. Joseph.

### **Their Spirituality**

Some of the Canadian martyrs were inspired by published accounts written by earlier missionaries. They asked their superiors to send them to New France to bring the Good News of the Gospel to the indigenous nations of Canada. They were aware of the risks of being present to people who were themselves in danger of being attacked by their enemies. Several among them had consciously embraced the perspective of martyrdom. They wanted to bring Christian faith to life within Huron culture. They lived with the Hurons, learned their language, and shared their risks without hesitation.

Jean de Brébeuf had actually made a vow not to shrink back from martyrdom. His brother Jesuits said of him, "He seemed to have been born for this country. His nature was such that he mastered the ways of the Indigenous people, doing everything possible to touch their hearts and win them for Jesus Christ." He was a man gifted in prayer who aspired to join Christ in his sufferings and cross. He wanted, like Our Lady with her pierced heart, to submit perfectly to "the will of God, though his heart had been filled with sorrow."

A teacher, Antoine Daniel had made a musical adaptation of the Our Father and founded a school for young Hurons. Like the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, he refused to leave the mission because he wanted to bring consolation to the dying.

Noël Chabanel had asked to be sent among the Hurons. Although he found it difficult to adapt to their way of life and had trouble learning their language, he had promised to spend his life in the mission. He confided to another Jesuit, "I don't know what God wants to do with me, but I feel that I have changed in one way: I am by nature apprehensive, but now that I face grave danger and death is perhaps not far off, I no longer feel fear. May good come of my offering of myself to God. May I be wholly his."

Such was Isaac Jogues' zeal and strength of spirit that he was nicknamed the "Bird of Prey". In his prayer, he begged God to let him suffer. When he was taken prisoner, he refused to try to

escape. After he was *tortured* and escaped, he did so in order to return to the mission, which he called "His Spouse by Blood". His companion Jean de la Lande said that his "desire to serve God drew him to a country where he expected to die."

# What is a Martyr?

**Definition of 'martyr':**

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**Characteristics of a Martyr:**

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Draw a picture in the space below that depicts one (or more) of the Canadian Martyrs

## Novena Prayer

O God,  
who by the preaching and the blood of your blessed Martyrs,  
John and Isaac and their companions,  
consecrated the first fruits of the faith  
in the vast regions of North America,  
graciously grant that by their intercession  
the flourishing harvest of Christians  
may be everywhere and always increased.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.



Image: painted by Sister Mary Nealis, RSCJ, 1924. Courtesy of Martyrs' Shrine, Midland, Ontario  
Prayer: Used with permission of Martyrs' Shrine, Midland, Ontario