

North American Martyrs (Isaac Jogues, Jean de Brebeuf and Companions)



Feast Day (US): October 19

Feast Day (Canada): September 26

Canonized: June 29, 1930

On October 19, we honor the six Jesuit priests and two lay missionaries who we have come to know as the North American Martyrs. Their work for the Lord began in 1636 in the land that would become Canada. Father Isaac Jogues, Father Jean de Brebeuf, and Rene Goupil, a layman with medical training, and other helpers were sent from France to preach the Gospel to Native American tribes in the land that was known at that time as “New France,” and in the land that would become the USA. The other missionaries who traveled to North America were Gabriel Lalement, Noel Chabanel, Charles Garnier, Anthony Daniel, and John Lalande.

These faith-filled men were not welcomed by the Native Americans, who did not trust new settlers. They did not care that these were men of God. The Native Americans only knew that settlers had cheated them in the past and had taken their best hunting grounds.

The missionaries first worked among the Huron tribes. They built a mission near an Indian village. They were accepted by the Hurons because they tried to help them, nursing them through illnesses and teaching them new farming skills. In time, the missionaries were able to begin to teach the Huron people about Jesus. Father de Brebeuf even wrote a catechism in the Native American language to teach the children.

Because the members of Iroquois tribe and the Hurons were enemies, the Iroquois believed that the missionaries were also their enemies. The missionaries wanted to bring peace to these two tribes and to share the Good News with the Iroquois as they had done with the Huron people.

Over the next eight years, these brave missionaries were brutally killed. We know many details about their work among the Native Americans and their deaths because of the letters and journals they wrote.

We honor all these men as saints who died for their faith. They believed with all their hearts in the words Father Daniel is reported to have said as he was killed, “We will meet again in heaven.” The men were all canonized as a group in 1930.

The North American Martyrs planted the first seeds of faith on our continent. We thank God for their bravery. They truly lived Jesus’ command, “Make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).