

from the HouseTops

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Saint Benedict Center

The Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

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To Our Readers

An age old wisdom of Christian tradition attributes the growth of the Faith to the blood of martyrs. It is often expressed in the words of a Latin Father of the Church from the time of the Catacombs, who said: "*Semen est sanguis Christianorum.*" Literally translated, "*The blood of Christians is seed.*"

This truth must apply also to later times. And hence we may well affirm that, whatever strength of faith we may yet find in America, whatever loyalty to the Church and to the ideals of Catholicity, must be attributed, in no small degree, to the heroic lives and deaths of our Eight North American Martyrs.

To these valiant heroes, therefore, who have watered and seeded our land at the very dawn of its national existence, with their generous blood of martyrdom, we dedicate this twentieth issue of our periodical.

And with this dedication and with the featuring of their exciting and inspiring adventures in this issue, we invoke the intercession of our eight beloved Patrons for several urgent needs:

For the grace of holy desires to ourselves and to all our fellow Americans.

For the favour of more Apostolic zeal in our time.

For the restoration of Catholic unity throughout the Christian World, and with that unity, the return of authority in matters of faith and objectivity in morals—conditions without which no Christian civilization can survive.

And finally, for the grace of all graces, the most imperative of our real needs, the necessary condition for salvation, namely, the grace of cooperating with each and every grace.

Saint John de Brébeuf, Saint Isaac Jogues, and their Six Companions,

Pray for America

Faithfully, in the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Brother Francis, M. I. C. M.

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 BRÉBEUF, 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

Brébeuf was born on the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1593, at Condé, about seven miles from Saint Lô 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 Brébeuf 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



John de Brébeuf

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.

Brébeuf 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 Brébeuf, 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