

NORTH AMERICAN MARTYRS

The North American Martyrs were eight Jesuit missionaries who journeyed from France in the early 1600s to “the New World” to convert Native Americans to Catholicism.

Father John De Brebeuf, known as Echon to the Algonquins he worked with, a giant of a man in stature and in holiness, started the work of the new Jesuit mission efforts in America among the Algonquins and the Hurons in 1626. Living conditions were crude, and the language barrier made mission work difficult. One of his ablest young assistant missionaries proved to be an intelligent, thirty-two-year-old Jesuit from Dieppe, **Father Anthony Daniel**. By August of 1636, Father Brebeuf 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**. 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. They had to travel to Quebec for the necessary supplies. It was early August when the heavily packed canoes were finally ready to return to their mission. 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 donné, a layman who served the Jesuits, named **René Goupil**. By this time, the wars between the Native American tribes were taking their toll. The Iroquois and the Mohawks were enemies of the Hurons, and the Mohawks captured and tortured Rene and Father Jogues. This was a dark time for the Hurons, who cherished their missionaries, and many Huron people were killed in trying to save the priests. After a long time in captivity, René Goupil was killed by blows from a tomahawk. Father Jogues escaped, and after a long journey, returned to France.

By 1644, a virtuous, thirty-one year old Jesuit, **Father Noel Chabanel**, would accompany Brebeuf on this his third and final journey to the Hurons.

In 1646, Father Jogues returned to America. After one diplomatic mission to the Mohawks in June of 1646, he returned for another in August with a young donné, **John de Lalande**.

At this time, they found out that Father Jogues' first trip to the Mohawks in June had brought them disease and swarm of worms, which had destroyed their harvest. The Mohawks were convinced Jogues was a sorcerer, so they captured him, beheaded him, and threw his body in the Mohawk River.

In June of 1648, Father Anthony Daniel had left the mission on a brief retreat, but on his return, the town he stayed in was set on fire, and he was murdered by the Iroquois just after he said Mass.

In January 1649, a thirty-eight year old Jesuit, **Gabriel Lalemant**, arrived at the Sainte Marie mission most eager to work among the Native Americans. On March 15, the Iroquois attacked the mission, and Father Brebeuf and Father Lalemant were tortured and killed. Southwest of there, there were four Jesuit missionaries working with the Petun Indians. By December, Father Charles Garnier was also killed by attacking Iroquois, and Father Chabanel was killed by a renegade Huron.

The Feast of the North American Martyrs is celebrated on October 19th.

Often, along with the eight Jesuit priests who are the North American Martyrs, **St. Kateri Tekakwitha** is included, although she died of natural causes rather than martyrdom. Canonized in 2012, St. Kateri (or Katherine) was a young Algonquin girl whose mother was converted by the Jesuit missionaries during the Iroquois wars. She had been left scarred and partially blind when she was young, and although she already followed the Catholic faith, Kateri desperately wanted to be baptized, which she was, at the age of 21. While her family wanted her to marry, she wanted to devote her life to Jesus. Unfortunately, in 1680 at the age of 24, she became ill and died, never having lost her faith. St. Kateri's feast day is July 14th.