

The North American Martyrs

Priesthood at Its Heights

My dear daughter, sweet child, write my words carefully, because they are of the utmost importance. I address them to my beloved sons, the priests, dedicated to the most intense and extraordinary imitation of my Son in the perfect carrying on of His Eternal Priesthood.

Beloved sons, so cherished and greatly blessed among the sons of men, be careful to uphold the sanctity and dignity of your calling. Let the faithful see in you the favored and especially loved imitators of the Son of God. Be modest in your dress and speech as becomes those of so exalted a vocation. The apparel and manners of a man of the world is not for you, who, though living in the world, must not take on its ways.

It is through you that the grace of the Sacraments is given to souls. Strive then to make yourselves more worthy receptacles to receive these graces and transmit them in turn to the souls under your care.

Dear sons, I ask you to practice self-denial and penance in a special manner, because it is you who must lead my children in the way of peace. Yet this peace will come only by way of the sword, the flaming sword of love. If, therefore, you love my Son and wish to honor me, heed my admonition and be the first to give the example of a life of penance and self-denial. Thus, by sanctification from within you, you will become a bright and burning light to the faithful, who look to you for help and guidance.

I am pleased, dearly beloved sons, by the honor and love you have until now accorded me. Will you now go further and honor me yet more by taking my words to your hearts and doing what I ask?

(Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil, Diary, "Our Lady of America®", Fostoria, OH, pg.20- Exhortation to Priests from Our Lady)

Who are these North American priests and martyrs, and what is their connection to the devotion of “Our Lady of America®”? Mindful that both Our Lord and Our Lady had engaged in locutions with Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil over **15 years prior** to “Our Lady of America’s®” first appearance on the feast of the North American martyrs (September 26th-pre-Vatican II), ***we must ask why Our Lady chose their feast for her first appearance for this new devotion?*** One thing we know for certain, with God there are no accidents; nothing happens by chance for that would be imperfection. Everything serves His purpose. So there has to be a purpose for Our Lady’s choice of this feast day, which is not the day of Sister’s first encounters with Our Lady but is the day of the first appearance of Our Lady under the new image of “Our Lady of America.”



These 8 Jesuit missionaries are referred to as “Canadian Martyrs” or “North American Martyrs. They came to America to work with the Indians, mostly in the area of Canada around Quebec and Lake Ontario. Collectively they are the patron saints of Canada; three, however, have special significance for the United States of America, as they were martyred in the upstate New York area along the Mohawk River in what is now Auriesville, NY and where a shrine run by the Jesuits is dedicated to the martyrs. The names of the eight are Jean de Brebeuf, Noel Chabanel, Antoine Daniel, ReneGoupil, Isaac Jogues, Jean de la Lande, Charles Garnier, and Gabriel Lalemant.

The Jesuits, founded by St. Ignatius in the 16th century during the turbulence of the Protestant Reformation, had become renowned by the 17th century for their zeal as missionaries and as ardent defenders of the Faith. They came to New France to imitate the zeal of the 12 apostles in going forth to preach the Good News of salvation to the ends of the earth, and to baptize in the name of Jesus. They established a settlement in Huronia and made many converts among the savage Huron Indians who, at the time, were in bitter feud with the Iroquois who considered these “Black Robes” as targets because of their friendship with the Hurons. In spite of being converts, the Hurons maintained superstitions and mistrust of these holy men. Whenever disease or failure of crops hit the village, the Indians often turned against the missionaries as though they were evil shamans who brought these curses upon their people.

Rene Goupil, Isaac Jogues and Jean de la Lande were the three who were martyred in upstate New York and are of special importance to us, for their blood fed the soil of these United States of America. Except for Rene Goupil and Jean de la Lande, lay brothers, all these martyrs were Jesuits priests. Isaac Jogues and Rene Goupil were working amongst the Huron and Algonquin Indians who were allies of the French when they were captured by Mohawk Iroquois in 1642 as they returned to Sainte Marie, the Jesuits’ Christian settlement near present day Auriesville, NY. They were tortured and enslaved and several of Isaac Jogues fingers were eaten or burned off, making him unable canonically, without his thumb and index fingers, to say Mass any longer. After 13 months of horrendous torture and just before he was to be burned to death, Isaac managed to escape and eventually made it back to France. Pope Urban VIII recognized him as a “living martyr” and gave him special permission to say Mass

with his mutilated hands. No such exception had ever been granted before. On September 29th, feast of St. Michael, guardian of the Church and God's people, who would also become guardian to the visionary for "Our Lady of America®", Sister Mildred Neuzil, Rene Goupil was tomahawked to death near Auriesville, NY, after making the sacred sign of the cross on the head of a young boy, thus becoming the first of the group to be martyred.

After a few months of recuperation in France, Father Jogues asked to return to the Hurons where he and Jean de la Lande, an oblate like Rene, were sent as peace ambassadors back to the very Mohawks who had previously tortured Father. They procured a peace treaty and went on to Quebec, but asked to return to the Mohawks again. However, when disease and failed crops hit the village hard, the priests were blamed as sorcerers and became scapegoats for the Mohawks' vengeance. Both Isaac and Jean were clubbed to death and beheaded, again near Auriesville, New York, on October 18, 1646. The other five priests, working in Canada and this same area, were martyred in 1648 and 1649. As a group, all eight were beatified by Pope Pius XI on June 21, 1925, and only five years later, canonized by him on June 29, 1930. Their feast day in Canada is still September 26th, though here in America, the feast was changed after Vatican II to October 19th. It is significant that these canonizations took place in a century that would be plagued by atheism and nationalism.

Reference: <http://www.jesuits.ca/Ania2002/English/martyrs.html#jogues>
<http://catholicism.org/eight-na-martyrs.html>

So why is this feast day so important that Our Lady would choose it for her first appearance as "Our Lady of America®"? While we cannot presume to know the mind of God, we can reflect on the needs of the times, as Our Lady makes her appearances when there is great need within the Church. No doubt, the tremendous attacks being made on the ministerial priesthood in the 20th century Catholic Church and the need for the renewal of that priesthood had some part in Our Lady's choice. No doubt, the rise of such varied atheistic ideologies and the glorification of the state throughout the century called for a new priestly and missionary zeal within the Church, modeled on the apostolic spirit of these first martyrs. No doubt the growing dissensions within the Church and the growing failure of those entrusted with the teaching and defending of the Faith, particularly in the institutions of higher learning, demanded a reawakening of the Faith with a new experience of the Holy Spirit, that Divine Enlightenment for the Revelation of God. The Church's Collect prayer for the feast day says it well.

"Father, you consecrated the first beginnings of the faith in North America by the preaching and martyrdom of Saints John and Isaac and their companions. By the help of their prayers may the Christian faith continue to grow throughout the world.

Surely there were many missionary priests and laymen who had come to our native land even before and with these Jesuits and lived exemplary Christian lives of evangelization, but none had been as blessed with converts as these. It is no accident that they would one day be **canonized** as a group in an age reverting to paganism so as to stand out as an awesome inspiration and challenge, especially to our priests and missionaries, to live deeply the call **to be "priest,"** the one who offers sacrifice to God, the sacrifice of one's own life, not merely in word but in fact, in imitation of the Eternal High Priest who was both victim and priest in that perfect Sacrifice that began on

Calvary and continues every day, on every altar around the world, until the day it is one with that heavenly banquet of the Lamb of God. This new world of America was barren in the Faith in the 17th century when these martyrs shed their blood. The Church has always claimed the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Faith in any land. The blood of martyrs is the inspiration for more martyrs and greater holiness in others. With these martyrs' blood, martyrs so dedicated to Mary Immaculate, who would later become our Patroness, Faith prospered in this land, but the 20th century saw the rise of atheism with Fascism, Nazism, Communism, the worship of human wisdom and science in the Industrial Revolution, the dehumanizing of the person and the growing disrespect for life itself, secularism, nuclear power with its nuclear threat that drilled fear, isolation, alienation, war and rebellion against authority into the hearts of mankind.

In 1917 at Fatima, during the first **World** war, Our Lady warned about these errors of atheism spreading throughout the world and stated that the smoke of Satan would rise even into high places within the Church. Christian nations were turning away from their Christian heritage and from the supreme authority of God over their lands. By way of her Son, Our Lady comes to share the foreknowledge of God and knew how terribly **this nation**, founded on the blood of these martyrs and rooted in deep Judaeo-Christian principles, would begin to abandon that heritage for the wisdom and ways of the world which grips it today in a deep black culture of death, religious tolerance and laxity which threaten the very substance of our Faith and threatens our own self destruction. **We cannot presume God will bless America when we refuse to recognize His supreme authority over our land. He will acknowledge those who acknowledge Him! This is covenant!**

Pope John Paul II called the 20th century the "most evil" in human history because of the scope of modern technology and global involvement in world wars. **He called for a "new evangelization" in the third Millennium and entrusted this Millennium to Mary.** Our Lady, worried for the salvation of her children, is calling us back to the Faith these martyrs witnessed to and for which they gave their blood to plant the seeds of faith in our soil. Our Lady appeared in unprecedented numbers around the world in the 20th century, warning and pleading for a reform of life – "reform is what I have asked, am asking and will continue to ask" -- lest we merit the justice and chastisement God threatens upon such a sinful generation. Prophets do not come when we are obedient to God; they come when we are steeped in sin. Our Lady is the prophetic voice of our age whose banner of Purity and Faith heralds the new millennium and cries for a new apostolic zeal and baptism in the fire of the Holy Spirit to bring new martyr-spirit to our lives in order to turn our desert land once again to holy ground with the reign of God's Son shining upon us. This land must know again the zeal of these early martyrs and the willingness to not only preach the Faith but protect it and die for it.

Our Lady calls us to be her army of chaste soldiers ready to fight to the death to preserve the purity of our lives, a purity of Faith as well as of heart and mind and body. She calls us to be "Torchbearers" bearing the flame of Divine Love and the knowledge of her Savior Son to our increasingly pagan and evil world. She calls on us to be an army of brave lovers to wield the sword, not of destruction, but of Divine Love to save so many who will not save themselves. She sends us guardian angels to watch over us, over America,-- angel Sultra and archangel Sardus-- who speak of the soil of our land being stained with the blood of martyrs and who hail the devotion of our land for the Immaculate One and who promise their protection of us, alongside Michael and Gabriel.

Our Lady warns us that the hatred of the world will be turned on us because of the divine mandate she has given us to lead the world back to Faith and Purity, to bring the peace of Christ, the only true and lasting peace, to mankind. That heavenly mandate demands that we stand tall, clothed in the armor of Christ, wearing across our shoulders the same banners these guardian angels wear –“the power of God,” and “the strength of God”—the sign that “In God we trust!”

Our Lady calls us, not merely to enthrone her statue in our National Shrine, but to **enthroner her first in our hearts, with true devotion**, listening to her voice, circumcising our hearts, examining our motives deeply against those 7 deadly sins that spiritually blind us to evil and error and those heretical practices that justify so many things that we do with such ungodly means to attain them. Our Lady challenges our intellectual pride that would choose the ways of the world over the ways of God, human wisdom over Divine Wisdom, the wise and powerful of this world over the humble and lowly who are God’s predilection. She challenges our abuse of authority and position that was given by the Master to serve others, not to lord it over the poor and powerless. She challenges our fear of human disapproval when we ought to fear only the judgment of God Himself.

Quite simply, it seems, Our Lady chose the feast of martyrs, priest martyrs, because our day needs so desperately a new age of holy priests and willing martyrs! This appearance as Our Lady of America on the feast of the North American Martyrs in 1956 was just prior to Vatican II. **Our Lady knew that her beloved sons, her priests, would become the target of Satan’s all out war upon the Church to prevent the spread of her message of the saving Indwelling Presence of the Most Holy Trinity that will crush Satan’s ugly head, the very message of saving grace she had come to give.** Sister Mildred was warned of this attack of Satan upon the Indwelling Trinity and his hatred for her for not abandoning her mission to us, a hatred that would cause her own spiritual martyrdom. Mary knows that Satan is the first general of every war, the master mind of every evil plot and deceit. He is a “strike force” who hits people when unprepared, before they can react. It is he who authored that brilliant military strategy of “divide and conquer,” “strike the shepherd and the flock scatters.” Our Lady knew the smoke of Satan was already blinding so many within the Church, allowing the evil one in to carry on his work of attempting to demolish the Church from within as well as from without. She knew the sin that would enter the Church of her Son especially through her beloved priest sons and she knew how they would compromise their purity and abuse the innocence of others. She knew of the grand flux of her priests and religious out of their convents and rectories and seminaries and into the more glamorous ways of the world.

How many times in the message of “Our Lady of America®” Jesus laments the refusal of grace of so many of His chosen ones, His priests and religious, whom He says, prefer the tawdry trinkets of the world to Himself. Surely Our Lady wishes to hold up the lives of these martyred priests and oblates to renew the ministerial priesthood of our day, the religious life of our day, the priesthood of the laity of our day! Does she not give that splendid exhortation at the beginning of this piece to call every priest to live up to the extraordinary imitation of the Eternal Priesthood of her Son? Does she not call every priest to live a life in the world, but not of it, a life of prayer and penance so as to lead the flock in the ways of holiness by example? Is she not calling for a new and

intense spiritual leadership in our day to counteract the hypocrisy and mediocrity that called forth such contempt from her Son?

It is a simple and easy task to place a statue in a shrine. It is NOT a simple and easy task to REFORM our lives, to be so serious about holiness of life that we would be willing to die for our Faith in Jesus and to protect the purity of our lives with our very lives. This is the martyrdom Our Lady is calling us to in an age that lacks the spiritual leadership and passion and commitment of martyrs, a Church not always willing to rise from the couches of the flesh. Surely Our Lady chose the date of the martyrs' feast to challenge us to reclaim our religious heritage, to reclaim our lives from that widespread heresy that we can live one way in private and another in public. Does Jesus not warn us we cannot serve two masters? Surely Our Lady's love for her priests is to console and encourage those who have fallen in the briar patch themselves when they should be protecting their sheep from its thorns? Surely she is calling her beloved sons, instead of discussing how to escape the priesthood, into that heavenly dialogue that unravels the splendor of celibacy and holy communion at the table of God's plenty. Surely she is asking our priests of today who have been faithful to their high calling to be even more zealous for the Faith as these martyrs were, to be as eager to lay down their lives for the Lord and His flock as these holy priests were. Let the blood of these martyrs flow in our veins!

Surely Our Lady is calling on a new age of holiness and martyrdom, for all, within the Church, as exemplified by these 6 priests and 2 lay oblates whose blood has written their lives deep within our soil. Surely it is Divine Wisdom that has brought the Church to recognize this demonic attack upon the priesthood of Jesus Christ and to call for this "Year of the Priest" and upon all the brethren to pray for our priests who are human like us, who need our prayers and protection from on high. There are those who say bishops, because of the tremendous responsibility of their positions within the Church, have two guardian angels instead of one. May it be so! Because of the sanctity and dignity of their call to the priesthood, because they are the leaders of the Church who must lead by example, because they are the teachers of the Church who must teach correctly and defend the Faith, because to destroy one of them might destroy a whole flock, Our Lady saw fit to inspire the Church to canonize these priests and martyrs and to hold them up for our inspiration and imitation in a world grown bitterly cold. Considering our times and the nature of our Mother's love for her children, it is not hard to understand why Our Lady chose the feast of the North American martyrs for her first appearance as "Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin.®" Patroness of America. They loved her and her Divine Son so! So must we!

Will our dear Lord be forced to continue His lament?

What am I to say of you, my best beloved? How long will you resist My love? It is from you I expect everything, and you give Me but the husks of your affection."

Or will we capture the spirit of St. John de Brebeuf and say.....

"I would travel all the way from France; I would cross the great ocean to win one soul for the Lord."