



The Holy See

**RADIO MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS PIUS XII
TO THE FAITHFUL OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA
FOR THE THIRD CENTENARY OF THE NORTH AMERICAN MARTYRS***

Sunday, 24 November 1946

Dearly beloved in Jesus Christ.

Just ten years ago We knelt in the sanctuary of your St. Patrick's cathedral. Beneath the aspiring arches, in the dim light falling from windows of the Lady Chapel, We prayed at the tomb of those revered prelates, whose memory carries the mind back over a century and more of extraordinary progress made from small and humble beginnings along a path not infrequently roughened by lack of workers, by poverty and calumny and even persecution. They were valiant champions of truth, those successors of the Apostles in governing the great diocese of New York, respected and well-deserving citizens of the country and city they loved. In God's kind providence their mantle has fallen on worthy shoulders.

But the commemoration you are celebrating this morning overleaps that century of vast and rapid growth, reaching back to the days when Manhattan Island counted hardly more than a thousand citizens, and marauding, inhuman tribes terrorized the upper sections of the country. Then it was that the first priest set foot in the colony that was later to become the metropolis of the new world. A ransomed captive, Father Jogues was leaving for a time his mission among the Mohawks; but he would return. Human language falters in the attempt to describe the ghastly tortures of a year-long captivity; the human soul shudders and recoils before the repeated scenes of gashing and stabbing, of beating and burning, distending and mutilating, that with a superhuman endurance he had borne for thirteen months. But he would return.

For his heart never ceased to be captive of the love of God. It was the love of God and God's love of souls that had laid hold on the young stripling of seventeen years and planted it in the garden of religious life. That same love tightened its grip on his expanding heart, as he heard of the hard and

rigorous mission across the sea among the savages of forest and plain, who nevertheless, he knew, were human souls needing the redeeming grace of Christ's passion and death. They had been offered for them as well as for cultured Europe. Isaac Jogues was only 29 years old when he first landed at Quebec; he was thirty-seven when he returned after a six months absence in Europe, and two years later — he was not yet forty — his brief life was crowned with the glorious triumph of dying a martyr for Christ.

He shared that glory with his two heroic, ever-loyal companions. They were not priests, John Lalonde and René Goupil; they were of the laity, one a doctor, the other a carpenter; but they were inspired by the same love of God and God's love of souls; their characters had been formed in the same mould of selfless courage, their ambitions stretched upwards to the same lofty ideals of sacrifice and self-dedication to the cause of the Heart of Christ. They did not want to go to heaven alone. Their faith was too precious not to wish to share it with others. Their sense of being Catholic was incomplete, did it not make them conscious of a duty to all the peoples of the world. The missionary spirit, they knew it, is not a virtue of supererogation expected of the chosen few. Missionary spirit and Catholic spirit are one and the same. Catholicity is an essential mark of the true Church; so that one is not genuinely interested in and devoted to the Church unless one is interested in and devoted to its universality, that is to its taking root and flourishing everywhere on earth. Those two laymen, like their priest leader, were restless with the thought that millions knew not Christ. O blessed three! Their bones rest together treasured in nature's own reliquary, the verdant hill that slopes gently up from the quiet, easy-flowing river of the Mohawks.

But those martyrs are not the possession of New York State alone. They belong to the whole nation. They were not the only missionaries martyred for the faith in America; but they are the first raised to the altars, given by the Church under God to be patrons of the land made fertile by their blood, to be an inspiration of those who have been made stronger by their death. Their message of missionary zeal, fired by the love of God and God's love of souls, is louder and more insistent at this hour, when war and war's aftermath have decimated so many ranks of missionaries and clogged so many sources of mission help. That message rings out across your blessed country, so providentially spared the horrors and destruction of other lands: from coast to coast, from the Gulf to the northern frontier and beyond, it is heard. Let men pause and hearken to its appeal. It is America's hour. The missions await the response.

St. Isaac, St. John, St. Rene, look down with heaven-born love on the faithful who fill the land you longed to conquer for Christ. Through your powerful intercession before the throne of God obtain for them all the grace to share something of the spirit that was yours on earth. May the clergy and religious intensify their interior life of prayer and self-abnegation, for in such soil missionary zeal springs up and grows quickly. May the youth, that American youth always so ready and eager to throw themselves whole-heartedly into every worthy and noble venture, for whom obstacles are but a challenge to their courage, may they seize the torch of faith, lighted by you in the wildernesses, and carry it full-flaming to the ends of the earth, until all men may see and know

Jesus Christ, the divine Master who has loved them with an eternal love, whom you, oh blessed martyrs, now contemplate with ineffable joy.

That this Our most earnest prayer may find generous response in the souls of all the faithful of America, a land dear to Us on many counts, We invoke on them with deepest affection of Our paternal heart the Apostolic Benediction.

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