

Excerpts taken from the *Jesuit Relations*
comprising a narrative by St. Isaac Jogues
of the
Execution & Martyrdom of Heroic Huron Converts
– prominent among them, Eustace Ahatsistari –
captured by raiding Iroquois, 3 August 1642

The Huron flotilla that was captured by the Iroquois on the St. Lawrence River on August 3, 1642 consisted of 40 persons, 12 canoes and 20 packages of Church plate & vestments, books and other supplies badly needed in Huron missions.

In the brief ambush and skirmish, 15 persons escaped, including one Frenchman whose identity was not disclosed. Two Hurons had been killed, and 23 persons captured – including Father Jogues, and the *donnés* Guillaume Couture and René Goupil.

It was common in tribal warfare to save the strongest and most prestigious captives for torture or adoption, or to extort ransom. It was also common to kill immediately some captives out of bloodlust, or revenge, or in thanksgiving to their pagan spirits, or because the prisoner was deemed to be a nuisance.

In St. Isaac Jogues own words:

“When they [the Iroquois] were dividing the plunder, I completed the instruction of such as were unchristianised, and baptised them. Among the rest was one such, an octogenarian chief, who, when ordered to enter the canoe to be borne off with the rest, exclaimed, ‘How shall I, an hoary old man, go to a strange and foreign land? Never! Here will I die.’ As he absolutely refused to go, they slew him on the very spot where he had just been baptised.”

The most prominent of the Huron captives was the warrior chief and covert Eustache Ahatsistari, On about the eight day of captivity St. Jogues remembered later that:

“Our pains were increased by the cruelties which they practiced upon us Christians – especially upon Eustache, both of whose thumbs they cut off; and through the midst of the wounds made on his left hand they thrust a sharp skewer, even to the elbow, with unspeakable pain; but he suffered it with the same – that is, invincible – constancy.”

It must be kept in mind that the prisoners were taken throughout all the local Mohawk villages, displayed upon an improvised stage and tortured, so it is difficult to pinpoint the exact location of specific torture – the entire area around present-day Auriesville, both north and south of the Mohawk River – was soaked with the blood of the martyrs and confessors .

It was common for prisoners to be distributed for execution to various towns, depending on their contributions and losses for warfare.

Thus St. Jogues writes:

“To almost all the Hurons likewise they [the Iroquois] granted their lives: three were excepted: Paul, Eustache, and Stephen, who were put to death in the three villages which make up the tribe; Stephen in the village where we were [then] known as Andagoron, Paul in Ossernenon [now called Auriesville], and Eutache in Teonontogen.”

Elaborating on Eustache St. Jogues writes:

“I also admonished them, (the prisoners) especially Eustache, that in the torment they should look at me and make some sign, so that I might bestow upon the last absolution, as I did in his case repeatedly ... The fortitude of this man was marvelous. ... He with Christian spirit entreated the Hurons present that the thought of his death should never prejudice the peace with the Iroquois ... [He] was burned in almost every part of his body, and then beheaded; he bore all most piously ...”

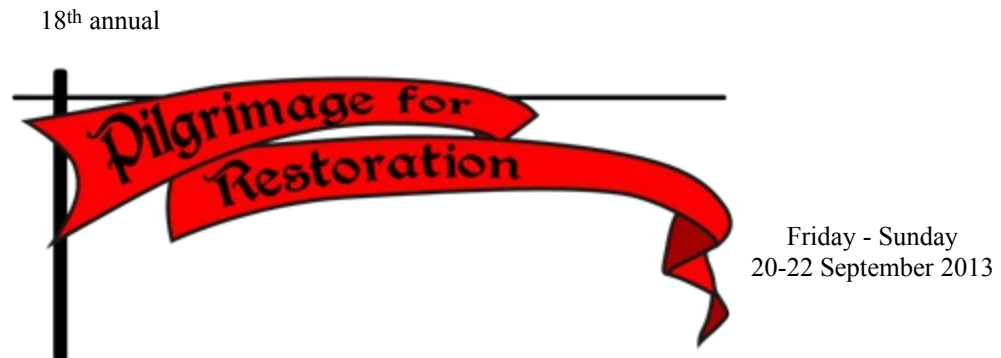
And as for the other Huron martyrs of Auriesville, St. Jogues writes:

“They also killed Paul Onnonhoaraton, a young man of about 25 years, of great courage, who laughed at death – being animated with the hope of a better life, as he publicly declared. This man, on the journey, when the Iroquois were coming to torment me, begged then that they should rather exercise cruelty toward him. God will have rewarded him for that noble charity, wherewith *dabit animam suam pro amicis suis*, who amid bonds, had begotten him for Christ.”

“Nobody makes pilgrimage alone.”

“*In unione orationum.*”

“Now is the acceptable time.”



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NCCL - 621 Jordan Circle, Whitehall PA 18052 USA
610/435-2634 registration@national-coalition.org

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Narrative composed by R. Swiatkowski, edited by G. Lloyd.

Quotations of St. Isaac Jogues' account of the execution of Huron convert-martyrs after capture August, 1642, cf. the *Jesuit Relations*, French & English edition in 73 vols., Pagent Book Co., New York 1959, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites; specifically, vol. 39, pp. 175-225. Cf. Also *Perils of the Ocean and Wilderness*, by John Gilmary Shea, Patrick Donahoe, Boston, pp. 16-22.

The oration of Eustache Ahasistari the day before his capture with Fr. Jogues is taken from the same *Jesuit Relations*, Pagent Book Co., New York 1959, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites; vol. 26, pp. 183-185.

Please report *errata* to [G. Lloyd](mailto:G.Lloyd), who is responsible for any errors herein.