

**Account of the
Martyrdom
of
St. René Goupil**

being a letter (undated, circa 1646)
written under obedience to superiors by
Father Isaac Jogues, Jesuit & Martyr

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Pilgrimage for Restoration

National Coalition of Clergy & Laity
621 Jordan Circle, Whitehall PA 18052-7119 USA
tel 610/435-2634 • coalition@fast.net
national-coalition.org/pilgrim

René Goupil was a native of Anjou, who, in the bloom of his youth, urgently requested to be received into our Novitiate at Paris, where he remained some months with much edification. His bodily indispositions having taken from him the happiness of consecrating himself to God in holy Religion — for which he had a strong desire — he journeyed, when his health improved, to New France, in order to serve the society there, since he had not had the blessing of giving himself to it in old France. And, in order to do nothing in his own right — although he was fully master of his own actions — he totally submitted himself to the guidance of the superior of the Mission, who employed him two whole years in the meanest offices about the house, in which he acquitted himself with great humility and Charity. He was also given the care of nursing the sick and the wounded at the hospital, which he did with as much skill — for he understood surgery well — as with affection and love, continually seeing Our Lord in their persons. He left so sweet an odor of his goodness and his other virtues in that place, that his memory is still blessed there.

When we came down from the Hurons in July, 1642, we asked Reverend Father Vimont to let us take him with us, because the Hurons had great need of a surgeon; he granted our request.

I cannot express the joy which this good young man felt when the superior told him that he might make ready for the journey. Nevertheless, he well knew the great dangers that await one upon the river; he knew how the Iroquois were enraged against the French. Yet that could not prevent him — at the least sign of the will of him to

whom he had voluntarily committed all his concerns — from setting forth for Three Rivers.

We departed thence on the 1st of August — the day after the feast of Our Blessed Father. On the 2nd, we encountered the enemies, who separated into two bands, were awaiting us with the advantage which a great number of chosen men, fighting on land, can have over a small and indiscriminate band who are upon the water in scattered canoes of bark.

Nearly all the Hurons had fled into the woods, and, as they had left us, we were seized. On this occasion his virtue was very manifest; for, as soon as he saw himself captured, he said to me: “O my father, God be blessed; He has permitted it, He has willed it — His holy will be done. I love it, I desire it, I cherish it, I embrace it with all the strength of my heart.” Meantime, while the enemies pursued the fugitives, I heard his confession, and gave him absolution — not knowing what might befall us after our capture. The enemies having returned from their hunt, fell upon us like mad dogs, with sharp teeth — tearing out our nails, and crushing our fingers, which he endured with much patience and courage.

His presence of mind in so grievous a mishap appeared especially in this, that he aided me, notwithstanding the pain of his wounds, as well as he could, in the instruction of the captive Hurons who were not Christians. While I was instructing them separately, and as they came, he called my attention to the fact that a poor old man, named Ondouterraon, was among those whom they would probably kill on the spot — their custom being always to sacrifice someone in the heat of their fury. I instructed this man at leisure, while the enemies were attending to the

distribution of the plunder from 12 canoes, some of which were laden with necessaries for our Fathers among the Hurons. The booty being divided, they killed this poor old man — almost at the same moment in which I had just given him a new birth through the salutary waters of holy Baptism. We still had this consolation, during the journey that we made in going to the enemy's country, that we were together; on this journey, I was witness to many virtues.

Upon the road, he was always occupied with God.¹ His words and the discourses that he held were all expressive of submission to the commands of the Divine providence, and showed a willing acceptance of the death which God was sending him. He gave himself to Him as a sacrifice, to be reduced to ashes by the fires of the Iroquois, which that good Father's hand would kindle. He sought the means to please Him in all things, and everywhere. One day he said to me — it was soon after our capture, while we were still on the way — “My father, God has always given me a great desire to consecrate myself to His holy service by the vows of Religion in His holy society; My sins have rendered me unworthy of this grace until this hour. I nevertheless hope that Our Lord will be pleased with the offering which I wish now to make Him, by taking, in the best manner that I can, the vows of the society in the presence of my God and before you.” This being granted to him, he uttered the vows with much devotion.

Covered with wounds as he was, he dressed those of other persons — the enemies who had received some blows in the fight, as well as the prisoners themselves. He

opened a vein for a sick Iroquois; and all that with as much charity as if he had done it to persons very friendly.

His humility, and the obedience which he rendered to those who had captured him, confounded me. The Iroquois who conveyed us both in their canoe told me that I must take a paddle and use it; I would do nothing of the kind, being proud even in death. They addressed him in the same way, some time afterward, and immediately he began to paddle; and when those barbarians tried to drive me, by his example, to do the like, he, having perceived it, asked my pardon. I sometimes suggested to him, along the way, the idea of escaping, since the liberty which they gave us furnished him sufficient opportunities for this; but as for myself, I could not leave the French and 24 or 25 Huron captives. He would never do so — committing himself in everything to the will of Our Lord, who inspired him with no thought of doing what I proposed.

On the lake we met 200 Iroquois, who came to Richelieu while the French were beginning to build the fort; these loaded us with blows, covered us with blood, and made us experience the rage of those who are possessed by the demon. All these outrages and these cruelties he endured with great patience and charity toward those who ill-treated him.

On approaching the first village, where we were treated so cruelly, he showed a most uncommon patience and gentleness. Having fallen under the shower of blows from clubs and iron rods with which they attacked us, and being unable to rise again, he was brought — as it were, half dead — upon the scaffold where we already were, in the middle of the village; but he was in so pitiful a condition that he would have inspired compassion in

¹ Let this be the example for all pilgrims. - editor

cruelty itself. He was all bruised with blows, and in his face one distinguished nothing but the whites of his eyes; but he was so much the more beautiful in the sight of the Angels as he was disfigured, and similar to Him of whom it is said: "*Vidimus eum quasi leprosum, etc., non erat ei species neque decor.*"

Hardly had he taken a little breath, as well as we, when they came to give him three blows on his shoulders with a heavy club, as they had done to us before. When they had cut off my thumb — as I was the most conspicuous — they turned to him and cut his right thumb at the first joint — while he continually uttered, during this torment: "JESUS, MARY, JOSEPH." During six days, in which we were exposed to all those who wished to do us some harm, he showed an admirable gentleness; he had his whole breast burned by the coals and hot cinders which the young lads threw upon our bodies at night, when we were bound flat on the earth. Nature furnished more skill to me than to him for avoiding a part of these pains.

After they had given us life — at the very time when, a little before, they had warned us to prepare for being burned — he fell sick, suffering great inconveniences in every respect, and especially in regard to the food, to which he was not accustomed. In that, one might say most truly, *Non cibus utilis agro*. I could not relieve him, for I was also very sick, and had none of my fingers sound or entire.

But this urges me to come to his death, at which nothing was wanting to make him a martyr.

After we had been in the country six weeks — as confusion arose in the councils of the Iroquois, some of whom were quite willing that we should be taken back —

we lost the hope, which I did not consider very great, of again seeing Three Rivers that year. We accordingly consoled each other in the divine arrangement of things; and we were preparing for everything that it might ordain for us. He did not quite realize the danger in which we were — I saw it better than he; and this often led me to tell him that we should hold ourselves in readiness. One day, then, as in the grief of our souls we had gone forth from the Village, in order to pray more suitably and with less disturbance, two young men came after us to tell us that we must return home. I had some presentiment of what was to happen, and said to him: "My dearest brother, let us commend ourselves to Our Lord and to our good mother the blessed Virgin; these people have some evil design, as I think." We had offered ourselves to Our Lord, shortly before, with much devotion — beseeching Him to receive our lives and our blood, and to unite them with His life and His blood for the salvation of these poor peoples. We accordingly returned toward the Village, reciting our rosary, of which we had already said four decades. Having stopped near the gate of the Village, to see what they might say to us, one of those two Iroquois draws a hatchet, which he held concealed under his blanket, and deals a blow with it on the head of René, who was before him. He falls motionless, his face to the ground, pronouncing the holy name of JESUS (often we admonished each other that this holy name should end both our voices and our lives). At the blow, I turn round and see a hatchet all bloody; I kneel down, to receive the blow which was to unite me with my dear companion; but, as they hesitate, I rise again, and run to the dying man, who was quite near. They dealt him two other blows with the hatchet, on the head, and dispatched him — but not until I had first given him

absolution, which I had been wont to give him every two days since our captivity; and this was a day on which he had already confessed.

It was the 29th of September, the feast of St. Michael, when this Angel of innocence, and this Martyr of Jesus Christ, gave his life for Him who had given him His. They ordered me to return to my cabin, where I awaited, the rest of the day and the next day, the same treatment; and it was indeed the purpose of all that I should not long delay, since that one had begun. Indeed, I passed several days on which they came to kill me; but Our Lord did not permit this, in ways which it would be tedious to explain. The next morning, I nevertheless went out to inquire where they had thrown that Blessed body, for I wished to bury it, at whatever cost. Certain Iroquois, who had some desire to preserve me, said to me: “Thou hast no sense! Thou seest that they seek thee everywhere to kill thee, and thou still goest out. Thou wishest to go and seek a body already half destroyed, which they have dragged far from here. Doest thou not see those young men going out, who will kill thee when thou shalt be outside the stockade?” That did not stop me, and Our Lord gave me courage enough to wish to die in this act of Charity. I go, I seek; and, with the aid of an Algonquin — formerly captured, and now a true Iroquois — I find him. The children, after he had been killed, had stripped him, and had dragged him, with a rope about his neck, into a torrent which passes at the foot of their Village. The dogs had already eaten a part of his loins. I could not keep back my tears at this sight; I took the body, and by the aid of that Algonquin, I put it beneath the water, weighted with large stones, to the end that it might not be seen. It was my intention to come the next day with a mattock, when no one should be there, in order

to make a grave and place the body therein. I thought that the corpse was well concealed; but perhaps some who saw us — especially of the youths — withdrew it.

The next day, as they were seeking to kill me, my aunt² sent me to her field — to escape, as I think; this caused me to delay until the morrow, a day on which it rained all night, so that the torrent swelled uncommonly. I borrowed a mattock from another cabin, the better to conceal my design; but, when I draw near the place, I no longer find that Blessed deposit. I go into the water, which was already very cold; I go and come — I sound with my foot, to see whether the water has not raised and carried away the body; I find nothing. How many tears did I shed, which fell into the torrent, while I sang, as well as I could, the psalms which the Church is accustomed to recite for the dead. After all, I find nothing; and a woman of my acquaintance, who passed there and saw me in pain, told me, when I asked her whether she knew what they had done with him, that they had dragged him to the river, which was a quarter of a league from there, and which I was not acquainted with. That was false: the young men had taken away the body, and dragged it into a little wood nearby — where, during the autumn and winter, the dogs, raven and foxes fed upon it. In the spring, when they told me that it was there that they had dragged him, I went thither several times without finding anything. At last, the fourth time, I found the head and some half-gnawed bones, which I buried with the design of carrying them away, if I should be taken back to Three Rivers, as they spoke of doing. I kissed them very devoutly, several times, as the bones of a martyr of Jesus Christ.

² An elderly Indian woman who offered Fr. Jogues some measure of hospitality during his captivity. - editor

I give him this title not only because he was killed by the enemies of God and of his Church, and in the exercise of an ardent charity toward his neighbor — placing himself in evident peril for the love of God — but especially because he was killed on account of prayer, and notably for the sake of the Holy Cross. He was in a cabin where he nearly always said the prayers — which little pleased the superstitious old man who was there. One day, seeing a little child of three or four years in the cabin — with an excess of devotion and of love for the Cross, and with a simplicity which we who are more prudent than he, according to the flesh, would not have shown — he took off his cap, put it on this child's head, and made a great sign of the cross upon its body. The old man, seeing that, commanded a young man of his cabin, who was about to leave for the war, to kill him — which order he executed, as we have said.

Even the child's mother, on a journey in which I happened to be with her, told me that it was because of this sign of the Cross that he had been killed; and the old man who had given the command that he should be slain — one day when they called me to his cabin to eat, when I previously made the sign of the Cross — said to me: "That is what we hate; that is why they have killed thy companion, and why they will kill thee. Our neighbors the Europeans³ do not do so." Sometimes, also, when I was praying on my knees during the hunt, they told me that they hated this way of doing, and on account of it they had killed the other Frenchman; and that, for this reason, they would kill me when I came back to the village.

I ask Your Reverence's pardon for the haste with which I write his, and for the want of respect of which I am thus guilty. You will excuse me, if you please; I feared lest I should fail at this opportunity, to discharge a duty which I ought to have performed long ago.

³ That is, the Dutch. - editor

Notes and Prayers

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