

A Free Gift

When you do the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, you realize the saint making potential it has. Not only do you desire to give the greatest glory to God with your life, you also do not prefer riches to poverty or health to sickness. In fact, in St. Ignatius' meditation on the three ways of being humble, the third way is not only to have an indifferent attitude open to the will of God, but to prefer poverty, to desire contempt from the world and to choose to appear foolish before the world.

Enter St. Isaac Jogues, a newly ordained Jesuit priest, who longed to share in the missionary efforts of Jesuits all over the world and on 1636 he departed for the New World.

When Fr Isaac landed in what we know now as modern day Quebec, he labored for six years learning the language of the Huron people, preached the faith and eventually become a competent woodsman—a very different life from the one he had in France where he taught culture and linguistics.

One day in 1642, he was sent to give medicine to an ailing missionary by water. On the way back from dropping off the supplies, Isaac and his Huron companions were ambushed on the river by the Mohawks and were captured and subjected to cruel torture. They were forced to run in between two lines of Mohawks, and as they ran they were brutally beaten with clubs and knives.

For over a year, Isaac was in captivity and endured cruel tortures even to the point of losing two of his fingers—the fingers he needed for saying mass. In the providence of God, the Dutch Calvinist missionaries heard about his plight and eventually ransomed Fr. Isaac and sent him back to France.

Many people thought Isaac Jogues was dead but instead they witnessed a living martyr. He was a legend and revered by many—even the Queen kissed his mutilated hands. Yet in his heart, he had only one desire: to go back to Canada and he even received a canonical dispensation from Pope Urban VII to say mass without those missing fingers.

Think about that. You have just endured some of the worst possible tortures and abuse ever and now you are in a land where everybody loves you, even the Queen! You could have lived the rest of your days in peace and comfort, but no:

Fr. Isaac wanted to go back to the Huron people, and especially to those who had hurt him.

“My heart tells me that if I have the happiness of being employed in this mission, <lbo et non redibo> (I shall go and shall not return); but I shall be happy if our Lord will complete the sacrifice where He has begun it, and make the little blood I have shed in that land the earnest of what I would give from every vein of my body and my heart.”

When he returned to Canada in 1644, he saw the Dutch who were surprised that he had come back and he established peaceful relations with the Mohawks who were also impressed by his courage and his peace of heart which harbored no ill-will toward them. Unfortunately, this peace did not last with the Mohawks and Isaac Jogues was tomahawked with an axe between his skull.

Those who lose their life for my sake will save it...

Gaudium et Spes paragraph 22 interprets this passage in this way: “Man...cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”

To make a complete gift of oneself like St. Isaac Jogues means loving freely, loving those who do not love you back; it means loving like our Father who makes the sun rise on the righteous and unrighteous alike.

Maybe there are people in your life who do not torture your body but they injure your heart because they are far from the faith or distant in relationship. Will you have the courage to love them still? Will you make of yourself a complete gift, free, unmerited like St. Isaac Jogues? Then we will know what it means to love perfectly, to love like our Father loves each one of us and to participate in that redemptive love which saved the world and can save our loved ones: “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rm 5:8).