

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Isaac Jogues

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 19

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IN BRIEF

Saint Isaac Jogues

French Jesuit priest, missionary in New France, martyred by the Mohawks in 1646, one of the North American Martyrs.

Feast day	October 19, September 26 (Canada)
Born	January 10, 1607, Orléans, France
Died	October 18, 1646, Ossernenon (Auriesville, New York)
Canonized	June 29, 1930, by Pope Pius XI
Era	17th century
Patron saint of	Canada (with the other North American Martyrs), missionaries in North America

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Isaac Jogues

Saint Isaac Jogues was a French Jesuit priest, born in Orléans in 1607, who served as a missionary to the Huron (Wendat) people in New France. Captured and mutilated by the Mohawks in 1642, he escaped, returned to France, then chose to go back to the very people who had tortured him. He was killed on October 18, 1646, at Ossernenon, today Auriesville, New York. He is one of the eight North American Martyrs canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1930. The Church celebrates him on October 19 with Saint John de Brébeuf and their companions; in Canada, their feast is kept on September 26.

Who was Saint Isaac Jogues?

Isaac Jogues is one of the most moving figures of the Jesuit missions in North America. Educated and sensitive, he wrote simply about what he lived. His letters and his account of captivity, preserved in particular in the *Jesuit Relations*, show a man who knew fear, pain and humiliation, but who never stopped loving the peoples to whom he had been sent.

His name is inseparable from those of René Goupil and Jean de La Lande, two lay helpers of the mission who were martyred like him in Mohawk territory, and from that of John de Brébeuf, his elder in the Huron mission. Ten years after his death, at Ossernenon itself, Kateri Tekakwitha was born, the first Native American saint.

Key dates in the life of Isaac Jogues

- **January 10, 1607**: Born in Orléans, France, into a prosperous merchant family.
- **1617**: Enters the Jesuit college in Orléans.
- **October 24, 1624**: Enters the Jesuit novitiate in Rouen.

- **1636**: Ordained a priest early in the year, he sails for New France and joins the Huron mission.
- **1641**: With Father Charles Raymbault, he reaches Sault Sainte-Marie, between Lake Huron and Lake Superior.
- **August 3, 1642**: Captured by Mohawks with René Goupil and Guillaume Couture, near Lake Saint-Pierre.
- **September 29, 1642**: René Goupil is killed before his eyes for tracing the sign of the cross on a child's forehead.
- **Fall 1643**: He escapes with the help of the Dutch at Fort Orange (Albany) and returns to France.
- **Spring 1644**: He sails back to New France.
- **May 1646**: He travels to the Mohawks as an ambassador of peace.
- **October 18, 1646**: Killed with a tomahawk at Ossernenon; Jean de La Lande is killed the next day.
- **June 29, 1930**: Canonized by Pius XI with the other North American Martyrs.

From Orléans to Huronia

The son of a cloth merchant of Orléans, Isaac studied with the Jesuits of his city and entered the Society in 1624. While teaching at the college of Rouen, he met missionaries back from New France, including John de Brébeuf and Énemond Massé. Their witness confirmed his desire to go. Ordained a priest early in 1636, he set sail a few weeks later.

In Canada, he traveled by canoe up the Saint Lawrence and the Ottawa River to the Huron country near Georgian Bay. There he learned the language, cared for the sick during epidemics, baptized and taught. With Charles Garnier he visited the Petun (Tionontati) nation; with Charles Raymbault he went as far as Sault Sainte-Marie, where he preached to thousands of gathered Anishinaabe.

Captive of the Mohawks

In 1642 Jogues went down to Quebec to fetch food and supplies for the mission. On the way back, the convoy fell into an ambush laid by Mohawk warriors, then at war with the French and their Huron allies. Jogues could have escaped, but he chose to stay with his captured companions. He was beaten, his fingernails were torn out and several of his fingers were mutilated. Taken to the village of Ossernenon, he lived there for thirteen months as a slave.

On September 29, 1642, René Goupil, a surgeon serving the mission whom Jogues had just received as a Jesuit brother, was struck down with a tomahawk. Jogues searched for his body in the nearby ravine and buried it as best he could. He himself continued, amid humiliations, to pray, to comfort Huron prisoners and to baptize the dying.



The shrine at Auriesville, on the site of Ossernenon.

Escape and voluntary return

In the fall of 1643, during a stay near the Dutch trading post of Fort Orange, Dutch settlers, among them the Reformed pastor Johannes Megapolensis, helped him escape. He reached New Amsterdam, the future New York, then Europe, landing in Brittany around Christmas 1643. In Paris, Queen Anne of Austria wished to meet him. Because his mutilated hands no longer allowed him to celebrate Mass according to the rules, Pope Urban VIII granted him a dispensation, saying, according to tradition, that it would be unfitting for a martyr of Christ not to drink the Blood of Christ.

Jogues could have stayed in France. Instead he asked to go back and returned to New France in the spring of 1644. In 1646 a fragile peace was concluded with the Mohawks, and he was sent to them as an ambassador. He returned, then set out again in September with the young Jean de La Lande to found a mission he had named "the Mission of the Martyrs."

Martyrdom at Ossernenon

Meanwhile, an epidemic and poor harvests had struck the village. Some blamed the missionary and a box he had left behind on his previous visit for bringing misfortune. Captured on the way, Jogues was taken to Ossernenon. On the evening of October 18, 1646, invited into a longhouse, he was struck with a tomahawk at the entrance. Jean de La Lande was killed the next day. Their heads were displayed on the village palisade and their bodies thrown into the river.

Why is Saint Isaac Jogues a patron of North America?

With the other North American Martyrs, Isaac Jogues is honored as a patron of Canada, and he is a patron of missionaries in North America. He is also one of the first saints who gave his life on the soil of what is now the United States,

and many parishes and schools in the United States bear his name. Catholics pray to him for missionaries, for persecuted Christians, for those who must forgive a grave wrong, and for reconciliation between peoples.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Isaac Jogues in art

- **The black Jesuit cassock**.
- **Mutilated hands**, recalling his torture and the papal dispensation.
- **A crucifix or a cross**, sometimes with a martyr's palm.
- **Forest, river or canoe**, evoking the missions of New France.

What can we learn from Saint Isaac Jogues?

Isaac Jogues was not a fearless hero: he felt fear and wept for his companions. But he chose to return to those who had tortured him, not for revenge, but to bring them the peace of Christ. He reminds us that forgiveness and mission go together. To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint Isaac Jogues or follow the novena to Saint Isaac Jogues, from October 11 to his feast on October 19.

Where to pray to Saint Isaac Jogues

- **Auriesville** (New York): Our Lady of Martyrs Shrine, on the presumed site of Ossernenon.
- **Midland** (Ontario): the Martyrs' Shrine, near the former mission of Sainte-Marie among the Hurons.
- **Quebec City**: the Cathedral-Basilica of Notre-Dame, which keeps relics of the North American Martyrs.
- **Orléans** (France): his native city, where his memory is honored.
- **Lake George** (New York): a statue recalls that he was the first European to name it, "Lake of the Blessed Sacrament."

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Isaac Jogues, Missionary and Martyr

Saint Isaac Jogues lived the mission to the point of giving his life, freely returning to those who had tortured him. This page offers an original prayer by Saintspedia asking for his intercession, especially for missionaries, persecuted Christians and all who need to forgive. It ends with a short invocation of the North American Martyrs.

Prayer to Saint Isaac Jogues

Saint Isaac Jogues, priest of Jesus Christ, you left Orléans and your family to bring the Gospel to the peoples of America. Give me a missionary heart, ready to go wherever God sends me.

You learned the language and customs of the Huron people so as to love them better. Teach me respect for those who are different from me.

You were beaten, mutilated and enslaved, and still you went on praying and comforting the other captives. Sustain all who are persecuted for their faith, imprisoned or mistreated.

You went back freely to those who had done you so much harm, to bring them peace. Obtain for me the grace to forgive those who have hurt me, and the strength not to return evil for evil.

Pray for today's missionaries, for the Indigenous peoples of America and for reconciliation between peoples. I also entrust to you my particular intention: (name it in silence).

May your example make me faithful to the end, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

Invocation of the North American Martyrs

You can end with an invocation in the style of the litanies addressed to these saints:

> *Saint Isaac Jogues, Saint John de Brébeuf and your companion martyrs, pray for us.*

When to pray this prayer

The Church celebrates Saint Isaac Jogues on October 19, with Saint John de Brébeuf and their companions; in Canada, their feast is kept on September 26. October 18 marks the anniversary of his death. You can pray to him before leaving on a mission trip, in a time of trial, or when forgiveness seems impossible. Parishes and schools named after him may also use it on their patronal feast. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Isaac Jogues, and read the life of Saint Isaac Jogues.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Isaac Jogues

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Isaac Jogues, Jesuit and martyr in North America. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, October 19, begin on October 11; the eighth day then falls on October 18, the anniversary of his martyrdom. In Canada, where the feast is kept on September 26, you can pray it from September 18 to 26.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act of the day helps you carry the prayer into daily life.

The nine days follow Isaac Jogues from his call in France to his death at Ossernenon. His story contains violence and suffering; it is told here without dwelling on it, to keep the eyes fixed on what he chose: faithfulness, compassion and forgiveness.

Day 1: The call from far away

In Rouen, the young Jesuit heard the stories of missionaries back from Canada. His heart caught fire for peoples he did not yet know. God often calls through the witness of others. A single story told with conviction can change the direction of a life, as it changed his.

Prayer: Lord, widen my heart to the size of the world, and show me where you are sending me.

Today: Pray for a missionary, or support a missionary work.

Day 2: Learning the other

In Huronia, Jogues learned a difficult language, shared life in the longhouses and cared for the sick. We can only proclaim the Gospel well to those we truly love and respect.

Prayer: Lord, give me the patience to listen and understand before I speak.

Today: Truly listen to someone whose ideas you do not share.

Day 3: Staying with his own

During the ambush of 1642, Jogues could have fled. He stayed so as not to abandon his captured companions. Love sometimes means remaining when we could easily leave.

Prayer: Lord, make me faithful, someone who does not let others down in hard times.

Today: Be present to someone going through a difficult time.

Day 4: In suffering

Beaten, mutilated and humiliated, Jogues knew pain and fear. He offered them, uniting himself to the Passion of Christ. He did not pretend to be strong; he trusted that God's strength would be enough.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I offer you my sufferings; unite them to your cross for the salvation of the world.

Today: Pray for Christians who are persecuted or imprisoned.

Day 5: The fallen companion

René Goupil was killed for a simple sign of the cross. Jogues searched the ravine for his body to bury it. Brotherly friendship goes to the very end. Even as a captive, Jogues would not leave his friend's body without the honor of a

burial.

Prayer: Lord, welcome into your peace those who have died for you, and those I have loved.

Today: Make the sign of the cross slowly and with reverence, and pray for someone who has died.

Day 6: The prayer of a captive

A slave at Ossernenon, Jogues carved crosses on trees and prayed alone in the forest. Even deprived of everything, he kept the freedom to pray. No one could take from him his conversation with God, and that inner freedom kept him alive and kind.

Prayer: Lord, when everything seems closed, keep open in me the path of prayer.

Today: Spend ten minutes in silence, alone with God.

Day 7: Unexpected help

It was Dutch Protestant settlers who helped Jogues escape. God works through hands we do not expect, and goodness crosses the boundaries we draw between churches, nations and peoples.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who have helped me without expecting anything; teach me to help in the same way.

Today: Thank someone who helped you through a hard time.

Day 8: Going back to forgive

Safe in France, Jogues asked to return to those who had tortured him, as an ambassador of peace. This is how far Gospel forgiveness can go. On this anniversary of his death, we ask for the same courage.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to forgive those who have hurt me, and to take the first step.

Today: Make a gesture of reconciliation toward someone with whom you are on bad terms.

Day 9: Giving his life

On October 18, 1646, Jogues died under the tomahawk at Ossernenon. The blood of martyrs becomes seed: ten years later, in the same place, Kateri Tekakwitha was born. Nothing given to God is lost.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Isaac Jogues, keep me faithful to the end and make what I offer you bear fruit. Amen.

Today: Offer a day of work or prayer for the conversion of those who do evil.

Closing prayer

Saint Isaac Jogues, missionary and martyr, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for missionaries, for the persecuted, for the peoples of America. Obtain for us a courageous heart, able to forgive and to serve. Saint Isaac Jogues, Saint John de Brébeuf and your companions, pray for us. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Isaac Jogues and pray the prayer to Saint Isaac Jogues.

CREDITS

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