

SEPTEMBER 26 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

"When a grain of wheat has to fall to the earth, and dies, it just dies; it will produce great fruit."

And today, 400 years later, it still produces great fruit. This reflects the martyrdom of our Canadian Martyrs, including Jean Brebeuf, Saint Isaac Jogues, Antoine Daniel, Gabriel Lalemant, Charles Garnier, Noel Chabanel, Rene Goupil, and Jean de Lalande.

These men were part of a great missionary effort based in France, aimed at evangelizing especially in French-occupied lands. Our friends in the United States will celebrate the same feast next month, on October 19th, as the Feast of the North American Martyrs.

Interestingly, the universal observance of this feast takes place on October 19th, while Canadian bishops received an exemption because the Shrine of the Canadian Martyrs in Midland will be closed on September 26th, after the tourist season. Historically, we have celebrated this on September 26th. Nevertheless, it is a wonderful way to honor our Canadian heritage and recognize how this great evangelization effort unfolded from France.

The Canadian Martyrs were part of a broader missionary initiative that included many others, primarily Jesuits. This effort began as early as 1603 when Fathers Masse and Biard were sent to Port Royal in Nova Scotia. As they settled and looked inland, they heard stories of other tribes and felt compelled to engage.

Their mission was always about seeking ways to evangelize and initiating conversations. They sought common ground, identifying where they could connect with others. Historically, Jesuits were highly

involved in interfaith dialogue. They quickly embraced the Grandfather Teachings from the Native community, which align closely with our own cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, courage, faith, hope, and charity. The Grandfather Teachings—wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth—echo similar values and served as a foundation for mutual understanding.

Even in the 16th century, they endeavored to translate, write about, and immerse themselves in the culture they encountered. This dedication resulted in the significant record known as the Jesuit Relations. The Jesuits were required to report back to their provincial in Paris and the general in Rome, documenting field activities, challenges faced, discoveries made, and cultural insights gained.

These writings, though sometimes redacted by various individuals, constitute a valuable deposit of knowledge about the culture of that time, the efforts of the Jesuits, and the dynamics of evangelization. They also illuminate the tensions created by European wars spilling into North America, showcasing how various tribes allied with different nations—the Dutch, the English, and the French.

In Canada, the conflict between the French and the English was pronounced. Nevertheless, amidst this turmoil, the Jesuits sought to evangelize, even in the face of historical grievances. Their intentions were driven by a desire to give their lives to God, wishing to embody that grain that falls to the earth and produces a sixty-, ninety-, and a hundredfold.

Amen.