

# Some Hidden Glories

The following brief stories of the men and women who received the faith is one of heroic virtue, constancy in faith, of courage, zeal and steadfastness in the practice of the new and strange religion taught to them by Jesuit Missionaries. For some their lives were crowned with the glory of giving their lives for their Saviour, Jesus Christ. As we learn more about them we are continually astonished at the miracle of their faith and the strength of their belief in Jesus Christ.

It was not easy for the Huron, the Iroquois, the Algonquins to accept Christianity. For them it was so foreign - so alien to all their customs, so terrifying, severe and stringent in its demands. Two things made Christianity acceptable to the Natives: 1) the wonderful example of faith given by the few early converts such as Joseph Chiwatenhwa, his family, and others and 2) the reality of the missionaries' faith shown in their readiness and desire to die for Christ.

So who then are these early converts of which we know? Here is a list of nine converts from the Relations of the period: Jean Armand Andeouarahen, James Oachonk, Therese Oionhaton, Ignace Saonaretsi, Genevieve-Agnes Skanudharoua, Etienne Tothiri, Rene Tsondiwane, Joseph Chiwatenhwa and Kateri Tekakwitha. The stories of Kateri Tekakwitha and Joseph Chiwatenhwa are well known and recorded in detail elsewhere. With your indulgence this writer would like to share some few details of the lives of the other seven heroes of the faith who are perhaps less well known.

## Jean Armand Andeouarahen

It was summer. A small group of Huron warriors returning from a foray into the enemy country were crossing a large open stretch of Georgian Bay on their way home to the little village of St. Michel. When they were halfway across, a violent storm arose, lashing the lake quickly into a fury and threatening to engulf their bark canoe. The Natives were terrified. They called upon all the demons they had been taught to worship but instead of subsiding the storm increased, and their bark canoe was on the point of foundering. It did not sink, however, because Christ was there (even as He was that night on the Sea of Galilee) in the soul of Jean Armand Andeouarahen, the only Christian in that terrified group.

Had not the Black Robes come into his life, he would have been exactly like any one of his companions. But Divine Providence sent him Father Antoine Daniel. God was good to Jean Armand. With the cleansing water of Baptism He gave him a deep and ardent love for his Faith and a trust in Divine Providence which made him a pillar of strength. He breathed a prayer to God. Perhaps he used the very words of the Apostles: Master, we perish. No sooner had he finished his prayer than



the waters in front of them became calm, although all around them the storm continued to blow with a fury that should otherwise have engulfed their canoe. By quieting the waters of Georgian Bay, Our Lord once again confirmed His promise not to leave His children orphans.

## James Oachonk

It was on the Island of Orleans, near Quebec, that the first Sodality in Canada, yes, in North America, was born, in the year 1653. Father P. Le Mercier describes the Sodality that was started among these Hurons, on the Island of Orleans thus: "What has most promoted the spirit of fervour in this Huron Colony is the devotion they have practiced during the past year to honour the Blessed Virgin."

The Iroquois were determined to kill or capture all the Hurons that had so far escaped them, and the poor Hurons on the Island of Orleans were not left out. Among the captured in the raid of April 1656 were eleven Sodalists, who, in the extremity of their misery, did not lose the spirit of piety. One of them was James Oachonk, then the prefect of the Sodality, and the most fervent of all our Christians. When that good Christian found himself a prisoner, instead of singing of his warlike achievements, he took for the theme of his song

what he had most at heart. When he was being tortured by the Iroquois, he sang: "Do not pity me! Do not look upon me as unfortunate! ...This life means nothing to me, for my thoughts carry me to heaven." As he was dying, he repeated, "My brothers, I am going to Heaven where I will pray to Him-Who-Made-All for your salvation." Father Brébeuf must have been praying hard for this Sodalist of Mary, as he looked down from heaven.

But though it died at last, the first Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary was the seed which has grown into the hundreds and thousands of Sodalities all over Canada and the United States, which have been watered in the blood of James Oachonk, the first Prefect of the first Sodality in North America.







### Therese Oionhaton

Oionhaton was the innocent victim of the interminable strife between the Iroquois and New France. The exact date of her birth is not known, but in 1642 she is mentioned as being 13 or 14 years old. In 1640 her uncle, Joseph Teondechoren, brother of Chiwatenhwa, placed her in the care of Marie de l'Incarnation and the Ursuline nuns at Quebec, to carry out the wishes of Chiwatenhwa, who had been

slain by the Iroquois during the same year.

Little Oionhaton endeavoured to conform with the religious practices of the nuns and even spoke to visiting Hurons about religion. After living at Quebec for two years, Oionhaton was provided with everything necessary for her marriage and in 1642 started on her return journey to the Huron country. Within two days of their departure the travelers were attacked by a war-party of Mohawks, while still on the St. Lawrence River. The survivors were taken as captives into the Mohawk country. Oionhaton "was taken prisoner by the Iroquois with her parents," states the Jesuit Relation for 1642.

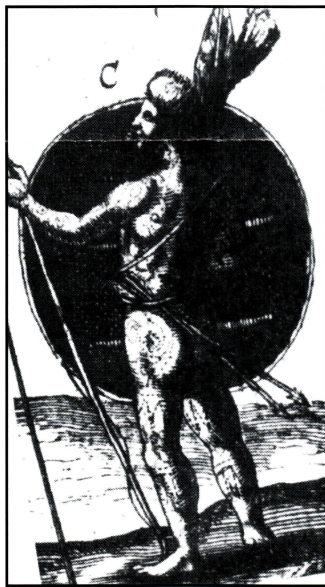
The French made repeated efforts to secure the release of Oionhaton from the Mohawks during the critical peace negotiations of 1645. Throughout her captivity she was steadfast in her faith and told her beads on her fingers. Father Jogues, who went with Jean Bourdon to the Mohawk country 18 May 1646, as ambassadors for the French, encountered Oionhaton among some Iroquois fishermen, spoke with her, questioned her, and instructed her. Jogues encouraged her to hope for deliverance, telling her that for the sake of the Ursulines at Quebec, Montmagny was doing everything possible, and that the Algonquins were doing what they could to secure her freedom.

In 1654 Father Simon Le Moyne found Oionhaton living in a cabin apart from the Onondaga village, where she reared her family in peace. In the fall of 1655, she traveled with a baby in her arms three leagues from her home to await the arrival of the "Black Robes". This last reference to Oionhaton is given by Fathers Chaumonot and Dablon on the occasion of their journey from Quebec to Onondaga.

### Ignace Saonaretsi

Among those slain at St. Ignace one of them was a pearl among our Christians. He was a young man, aged 24, a model of purity to all young men. He was very intelligent and steadfast in the faith and piety. For months, he had been preparing for death, mentioning that he often meditated on this subject. Hence he usually came at dawn to say his rosary in church and assist at Mass, as well as at evening prayers - unusually long ones at that! He was lucky in hunting and when he killed a stag, he usually knelt on the ground at once to thank God for it.

During the struggle with the enemy, seeing the superiority of their forces and the danger of being taken captive, he told his cousin then escaping: "My cousin, go and inform my mother that I shall be burned to death and not to mourn for me; I shall be thinking only of heaven."



Being near his older brother, a catechumen, he baptized him and they were the first two to fall in battle. Their mother, including all her family, embraced the faith after their deaths and it is evident that this young Christian left them heirs to his piety.

### Genevieve-Agnes Skanudharoua

Skanudharoua was born in 1642 at the Huron village of Ossossane, or La Conception, a daughter of a leading Huron chief, Pierre Ondakion, whose family had been the first of that nation to embrace Christianity, and his wife Jeanne Asenregehaon. Genevieve-Agnes had an ardent desire to become a nun and was admitted to the novitiate on 25 March 1657. She suffered a lingering disease of the lungs and was moved to the hospital infirmary on 15 August. She continued to discharge her religious duties as long as her strength would allow "with as much exactness as an old professed nun." On 1 November she was given the holy garb and at her own request, the name "Tous-les-Saints." A few hours before her death on 3 November 1657, she took the final vows, the first Native girl to enter the religious life. She was buried at the Hotel-Dieu in Quebec with other nuns.

### Etienne Tothiri

Etienne's story is found in the Jesuit Relations for 1642-1644. "Every day," says St. Charles Garnier, "we would go to St. Joseph to teach the few Christians in the village." Because it was largely a non-Christian village, the rest of the people were very hostile, and the missionaries had to rely on the use of a hut of some friendly Native for their headquarters. This arrangement had many drawbacks, not the least of which was the continual interference and heckling of the non-believers who assumed it their right to attend the classes, and who made it their duty to render it as difficult as possible for the Black Robes.

Etienne Tothiri had a cabin, his only possession in the world. His gift to the missionaries was a section of his cabin. It was the natives' custom to use one end of their cabins for storing wood and provisions for the winter. Tothiri cleaned out the back part of his cabin, erected a small partition and made two doors so that the missionaries could use one door and he the other. It was not a great gift. One half of a smoky cabin. But it was just half of what he owned.

Native hospitality forbade the natives from harming the missionaries since now they were guests. There was no law preventing them from taking out their revenge on their own. The arrows of persecution were turned from the missionaries to their flock, and the one singled out for the bitterest attack was God's friend Etienne Tothiri.

Whatever happened to Etienne we will never know. What we do know is that the widow gave her mite; Etienne Tothiri sacrificed one half his cabin. Both gifts were given to God with full hearts.

### Rene Tsondiwane

Perusal of the Relations often brings out this significant fact. Many of the Christian converts in Huronia developed high sanctity. Rene was an eleventh hour Huron convert.

On January 14th, 1641, Father Mercier with the help of his neophytes opened a new Chapel in the village. During his absence Father named Rene shepherd of the small congregation.

## **Rene Tsondiwane** - *continued*

Every day the old man assembled his fellow Christians for morning and evening prayers, and on Sunday, with the little flock in the bark Church, he led the Rosary.

Rene made this Chapel the centre of his life and he made God the focal point of his thoughts. Often he spent whole nights in prayer. "Frequently I awake," it's Rene speaking, "in the middle of the night; I think of God, and I find that the night passes without noticing it, more pleasantly than if I had slept soundly."

Father Ragueneau wisely remarks in the Relations that we recognize the man of prayer from his works of zeal and his exemplary life. Prayer flows over into good works. Rene visited the sick in their cabins, instructed his fellow Christians, and planted the seed of truth in the hearts of his non-believing countrymen.

Many of the missionaries felt with conviction that Rene was a very special friend of the Lord.