

March 16

St. John de Brébeuf

1593–1649 • France

A large, cheerful priest landed in the wilds of New France, which is now known as Canada. His name was John de Brébeuf, and he was a Jesuit missionary to the Native American Huron tribe. He had been to New France once before and had studied hard to learn the Huron language, but wars and strife had sent him back to France. Yet he had never forgotten the Huron people. They were children of God whose souls needed the saving waters of Baptism. Now he had returned, and he was here to stay.

John de Brébeuf lived in a small hut in a settlement among the Hurons. The weather, wild beasts, illness—all these were great dangers to him and the Jesuit missionaries. Not only that, the Hurons viewed the priests with suspicion, and their lives were in constant danger. Because the Jesuits were strangers, the Hurons would blame them if there was no rain or if their people got sick. Still, John de Brébeuf's missionary efforts flourished.

John de Brébeuf knew that the best way to explain Jesus's love to the Hurons would be to speak the way they spoke. He composed the Huron Carol, the oldest Canadian Christmas carol, so that the Hurons could celebrate Jesus's birth, too. He translated the catechism in the Huron language so that they could learn all about the Catholic Faith. Many Jesuit missionaries learned the Huron language because John de Brébeuf was there to teach them. Soon, there were Huron Christians in almost every village, so John de Brébeuf and his fellow Jesuits would travel from village to village, teaching the Hurons about Jesus and washing their souls clean with the waters of Baptism.

After many years serving the Hurons, John de Brébeuf was captured by the Iroquois tribe. The Iroquois and the Hurons were at war, and the Iroquois hated not only the Hurons, they also hated Christians. They attacked the settlement and captured John de Brébeuf, his fellow priests, and all the Huron converts. Then the Iroquois tortured John de Brébeuf in terrible ways. The Iroquois were impressed with his bravery, because he would not cry in pain but offered all of his suffering to Jesus. The Iroquois put John de Brébeuf to death, and he became a glorious martyr for Jesus. St. John de Brébeuf, help me to offer up my suffering to Jesus!

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