

“A Great Cloud of Witnesses”

A Historical Series of the Murals on the Walls of Holy Comforter-Saint Cyprian Church

Saint Isaac Jogues

17th Century Canada



Born in Orleans, France in 1607, St. Isaac joined the Jesuits when he was 17 years old. During this time of formation, he heard stories of the French Jesuit missionaries serving in the French lands of what is now Canada. At age 29, he was ordained and sent to follow in the footsteps of these French missionaries in the New World.

After arriving in Quebec, he was sent to the mission near Lake Huron to work with the Huron tribe. For six years, St. Isaac labored among these people, eventually helping to build a church, hospital, and cemetery.

In 1642, St. Isaac was on an expedition back to Quebec for supplies and medicine when his party was attacked by the Mohawk tribe, fierce enemies of the Hurons. St. Isaac could have escaped, but stayed behind after a companion was captured.

The prisoners were taken first to the Mohawk settlement near Lake Champlain in present-day New York state. There they endured incredible tortures, and St. Isaac's two index fingers were gnawed off. St. Isaac was later taken to the Mohawk settlement of Ossernenon further south. He was held as a slave there for over a year, and he suffered much from hunger and exposure. His captors

looked upon him with respect, calling him the “indomitable one.” His situation became known and he was freed by the Dutch living nearby in what is now Manhattan.

He journeyed back to France where his story caused a sensation. The Queen of Austria was only one of the many people who called upon him to hear his story. The pope himself gave St. Isaac special permission to offer Mass even though he could not properly hold the host with his now-missing index fingers.

St. Isaac soon went back to Canada, and even returned to Ossernenon and the Mohawks who had enslaved him to help enact a peace treaty between the Mohawks and Hurons. The Mohawks were amazed at his courage and his forgiveness, and St. Isaac was welcomed back. Yet soon after, famine broke out and the Jesuit was blamed by a vocal minority of Mohawks. He was murdered by this minority, and soon war broke out again between the Mohawks and the Hurons. Yet, the example of St. Isaac's heroism was not forgotten by the Mohawks, for the gentle priest had possessed in high degree the virtue the Indians most admired, bravery.

Some years later, when there was peace once again in Ossernenon, three Jesuit priests were sent there from Canada to establish a mission and they were well-received. Before long Mohawk converts were traveling to the seminary in Quebec to be trained as Christian leaders. St. Isaac and the other Jesuit martyrs were canonized in 1930. **His Feast day is September 26.**

Each month, this series will feature the murals painted on the walls of Holy Comforter-Saint Cyprian Church along with history and commentary. You can also find this series on our website at www.hcscchurch.org.
Historical commentary researched and prepared by Anthony Lickteig (Seminarian).