

Sunday, May 30, 2021 - Feast of St. Joan of Arc



Greetings!

Did you know that William Shakespeare *hated* Joan of Arc?

I don't think "hatred" is too strong a word either. In his play *Henry VI* (1591), written a century and a half after she died, he called her the "foul fiend of France" as well as a few other nasty and derogatory female terms which cannot be repeated in a polite publication!
What was his problem?

Well, the essence of it was that Shakespeare was *English*.

That feisty little French girl had humiliated the English a century before by breaking the back of England's invasion of her country. Her leadership of the armies of France was **the first time in a hundred years that the French had defeated the English in battle**.

To make matters worse, Joan was not very diplomatic about it either. Here is a portion of her first letter to the English prior to giving them a proper whooping:

You, King of England and you, Duke of Bedford, who call yourself Regent of the realm of France... Hand back to the maid, who is sent by God, the King of Heaven, the keys of all the fine towns of France you have taken and ravaged... And you, archers and soldiers, noble or not, who are before the city of Orléans, go in God's name back to your country King of England, if you do not do what I ask, I will force your men to depart wherever I meet them in France; if they do not, I shall have them all slain.

Have *you* ever spoken like that to a king or a military general? I haven't either.

The proud English commanders and arrogant nobles didn't take kindly to such insolence from **a French peasant girl, who by the way, was only *eighteen years old*** when she sent that first of numerous brazen and disrespectful letters to the invaders.

The memory of that defeat was still a festering wound in Shakespeare's England a century later, and perhaps the Bard was more swayed by the English "fake news" about Joan than we are today.

The Crowning Glory of the Middle Ages

Yet, Joan was the crowning glory of her time, the last gasp of heroism before Europe

broke apart in the Reformation. Notwithstanding the hatred of her enemies, Joan remains one of the most inspirational characters in all of history, and we remember her fondly because **today, May 30th, is the 590th anniversary of her death (1431) and her official feast day.**

Mark Twain, who loved Joan, once wrote that *“It took six thousand years to produce her; her like will not be seen in the earth again in fifty thousand.”* Quite high praise from a man who was known more for sarcastic humor than for his religious sentiment.

Joan *still* has that effect on people because she is seen by history as a kind of whirlwind of righteous anger and divine judgment that **knocked some sense into the men who had wrecked the patrimony of two great nations.** No one ever did what she did.

That little woman was like a colossus marching through a long dark period of history to mark the end of an age:

- She raised **the Siege of Orléans** (in May of 1429), liberating the most strategically important city in the whole conflict between the two nations - for this reason she is called the Maid of Orléans;
- She went on to drive the English out of the Loire River Valley (165 miles of territory in Northern France) that they had controlled since the Battle of Crecy in 1346;
- She launched the “beginning of the end” for the longest war in history, the **Hundred Years War** (which ended 25 years after Joan’s death);
- She made it possible for Charles VII to be **crowned King of France** and to take his rightful place in the history of the French monarchy.

Oh, and there’s also this: she accomplished all this in *less than one year.*

Her victories could be called the “great reset” of the Middle Ages because they reshuffled the deck of international politics at the time and clarified God’s will for the entire Christian world.

In essence, **Joan herself was the message** that *Christ wanted France to be free* and clear of the English, who, through politics and intrigue, had infiltrated a good portion of her country. At the time Joan comes on the scene, they were poised to conquer what was left of the Kingdom of France and subjugate the entire country to the British monarchy.

When Joan arrived with her purity and conviction – as an envoy of Christ Himself – she reminded all *the warring Christians* that **Christ was the King of Heaven to whom all, weak and mighty alike, owed obedience.**



Her Greatest Legacy

The story of her martyrdom is too long and sad a tale to recount here, but the Internet is full of books on her life and death. (The above quote is from John Beever’s book called, simply, *Joan of Arc*, and highly recommended).

I would just like to point out **one final detail of history that may escape even the most avid lovers of Joan of Arc.** In fact, it is her greatest accomplishment.

The solidarity of Christian civilization that had been achieved in medieval Europe was called by a single name – Christendom – but it was not to last after Joan’s death, despite the ending of the Hundred Years’ War. Joan had done her job, but the arrogant politicians and clerics didn’t follow suit.

Enter Martin Luther in 1517. **His Protestant rebellion shattered the unity of Christendom**

and infused doctrinal chaos into the Christian world in its long wake.

Henry VIII of England followed Luther's rampage, and we all know about that king's homicidal marital ethics. We sometimes forget, however, that Henry proclaimed himself the head of the Church in England (in 1535) – usurping the role of the pope – and dealt the death blow to any hope of maintaining a united Christian Church in Europe.

Joan of Arc's France was one of the countries that stood as a bastion of Catholicism against the Germanic and English rebellions of that time. **If France had fallen into the hands of England** during Joan's time, only God knows how deeply Christianity would have been wounded in its mission.

But the opposite happened.

In the centuries that followed Joan, there was an astounding rebirth of spiritual vigor and faith that issued from France. Not all is due directly to the influence of Joan of Arc, by any means, but **we can certainly say that *without Joan*, the rebirth would not have happened.**

You can see the implications as well as I can just by looking at a number of the Catholic saints who were products of future ages. One thing you will note in the following list is that a good number of these saints were founders of religious orders, which had a force multiplying effect on the evangelization of the world and the salvation of souls.

An English-dominated, Protestant France would *not have produced* these Catholic saints:

16th Century

St. Peter Faber (co-founder of the Jesuits)

17th Century

St. Frances de Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal (founders, Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary)

St. Isaac Jogues and the North American Martyrs

St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Maurillac (founders Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul and Congregation of the Mission)

St. John Eudes (founder, Order of Our Lady of Charity)

St. Claude de la Colombiere and St. Margaret Mary Alacoque – visionary of the Sacred Heart apparitions and her spiritual director

18th Century

St. Louis-Marie de Montfort (founder, the Company of Mary, the Daughters of Wisdom, and the Brothers of Saint Gabriel)

St. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (founder, Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools)

St. Benedict Joseph Labré

The Carmelite Martyrs of Compiègne and countless other martyrs of the French Revolution

19th Century

St. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier (founder, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd)

St. John Vianney – patron saint of priests

St. Bernadette Soubirous – visionary of Lourdes

Ven. Basil Moreau – (founder, Congregation of the Holy Cross)

St. Julian Peter Eymard – (founder, Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament and Servants of the Blessed Sacrament)

St. Catherine Labouré – visionary of the Miraculous Medal Apparitions

St. Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower

St. Peter Chanel – Apostle to Oceania.

Because of these countless, selfless French missionaries, **entire continents and remote parts of the world now have the Christian faith**, including great swaths of our own North America.

Other areas of French evangelization include West Africa, Asia (particularly Vietnam and Korea), Oceania, parts of the Caribbean, and elsewhere.

What a debt of gratitude the entire Catholic world owes to them – and to one feisty medieval Maiden named Joan.

Our Feature Articles

St. Joan of Arc never ceases to fascinate the imagination of the world in every day and age. For a few more details about Joan's finest hour, see our first feature article, "Stories of Joan of Arc at Orléans".

Our second feature harkens back to last week's feast of the Holy Spirit as we beg the gift of the Holy Spirit upon us and our family with the fascinating community of prayer called Taizé, "The Beautiful "Veni Sancte Spiritus" Sung by Taizé".

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Stories of Joan of Arc at Orléans



The Beautiful "Veni Sancte Spiritus" Sung by Taizé



With deepest gratitude!

Peter Darcy

If you are benefitting from this newsletter, kindly forward it on to others who may have an interest in St. Joan of Arc or in the award-winning Sacred Windows website. Every week I post a new article.



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