The Florida Martyrs

Q & A with Patricia Cook and Cristina Logan

Q: Who are the Florida Martyrs?

A: Pat Cook

"The Martyrs of La Florida," also known as Antonio Inija and 57 companions, were Catholic missionaries and indigenous converts killed for their faith between 1549 and 1715 in the area then known as La Florida. Of the 58, only 17 were clergy or religious brothers from Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit orders. The Vatican's Dicastery for the Causes of Saints is currently examining evidence for the Canonization of these 58 individuals, including men, women, children, and one unborn child.

Q: Why are they considered for Canonization, and where do the Florida Martyrs fit into this process?

A: Pat Cook

The Martyrs are currently in the Catholic Church's formal cause for beatification and Canonization. King Philip V informed Pope Clement XI of the Apalachee Indians' martyrdom in 1704. In his account to the Pope, he recognized the heroic way they died for Jesus Christ: "in imitation of the glorious martyrs of the Church …they merit in their time the name and veneration of such martyrs."

Sadly, history largely failed to recognize them for centuries. The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee formally opened the cause for their Canonization on October 12, 2015. On February 14, 2022, the diocese filed documentation with the Vatican's Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, seeking formal recognition of their martyrdom. This is significant because martyrs need only one miracle to be canonized (instead of two). The Martyrs are currently considered "Servants of God" until their martyrdom receives canonical recognition. At that point, they will be considered "Blessed" until a verifiable miracle is attributed to their intercession.

Q: Why is martyrdom so important to our Roman Catholic Faith?

A: Pat Cook

Martyrdom is important because it means that someone loved God so much that they gave their life for him willingly. It is also at the heart of our faith because Catholic teaching states that God first loved us. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Our life is centered around Christ's own Passion, and martyrdom is the most radical witness of following the example of Christ in laying down his own life for us

Next Week Q & A by Cristina Logan: Stay Tuned...



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Q: Why is the history of the Florida Martyrs important to Holy Faith Catholic Church?

A: Cristina Logan

First of all, the name Holy Faith, or Santa Fe, comes from the Franciscan missions established on our soil. Our parish takes its name from the historic mission of Santa Fe de Toloca, one of the Franciscan missions established in this region. Even the name San Felasco reflects this history. San Felasco Hammock is named in connection with Mission San Francisco de Potano, a Franciscan mission established in 1606. The name San Felasco is believed to have developed from the way "San Francisco" was pronounced by Indigenous people and early settlers in this area.

The University of Florida has discovered and studied archaeological evidence of these Franciscan missions in the Gainesville and Alachua County area, including the mission of San Francisco de Potano. This gives us a remarkable connection to the Catholic history of the land on which we live and worship.

Holy Faith is uniquely connected by name to this Franciscan missionary tradition. Our parish is part of a living legacy that reaches back more than 400 years, to the missionaries and Indigenous Catholics who lived, worshiped, taught, suffered, and, in some cases, gave their lives for the faith here in La Florida.

What does this history mean for our mission as a parish?

A: Cristina Logan

We are all uniquely blessed and uniquely called. Those of us who have chosen Holy Faith Catholic Church are, in a sense, living out the dreams and sacrifices of the missionaries who came here more than 400 years ago. When I examine my own personal calling, I always look to where I was planted. The soil upon which our Diocese was built is not only part of the beginning of our American history; it was also blessed by the witness and sacrifice of those who gave their lives for the Catholic faith.

That history includes Indigenous Catholics and missionary catechists, as well as Franciscan missionaries, who endured persecution and martyrdom for their faith in Christ. They showed their love for the Cross, the Blessed Sacrament, and Our Lady of La Leche by remaining faithful even in the face of suffering and death.

Our parish has a responsibility to honor that legacy. We do this by following the way of Saint Francis: through humility, service, evangelization, and a willingness to give ourselves in sacrificial love.

Q: What does this mean for our own personal mission?

A: Cristina Logan

It is an extraordinary honor and a profound gift to celebrate the Eucharist on land where Catholics gave their lives, rather than abandon the faith and the Sacraments they had received..

to be continued ...

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... continuation:

Q: What does this mean for our own personal mission?

A: Cristina Logan

That sacrifice was made not only by those who were already here, but also by those who came to teach them about Christ. Their lives remind us that faith is not something we simply inherit; it is something we are called to live and, when necessary, to sacrifice for.

Certainly, the history is not perfect. There were human failures, conflicts, injustices, and profound suffering. The mission system itself was part of the larger reality of Spanish colonization, and Indigenous communities experienced both the Gospel and the pressures and disruptions that accompanied colonization.

But when we study this history closely, we also see Catholic missionaries seeking to defend the dignity and welfare of Indigenous peoples against exploitation and abuse. That witness does not erase the complexity of the history, but it is an important part of it.

This part of our history challenges us today. We must ask ourselves how we can live our own mission more faithfully. How do we show our love for the world God created? How do we defend the dignity of every person? How are we willing to give ourselves in service to others?

The Florida Martyrs remind us that, ultimately, our Christian vocation is a call to sacrificial love----to give our whole selves to Christ and, through Him, to one another.