

Her Voice counseled her to “Answer boldly,” and she did. Asked if she were in a state of grace, Joan answered, “If I am not, may God place me there; if I am, may God so keep me. I should be the saddest in all the world if I knew that I were not in the grace of God.” Her inquisitors were stunned.

Joan was often questioned about her choice to wear men’s clothing, and whether she’d would wear a woman’s dress. The clergy who served on the tribunal later said Joan had kept her attire tied tightly together during her months in prison because she said she needed such an outfit to protect herself: “[When the judge told her] that it wasn’t proper for a woman to wear [...] she said she didn’t dare give up the hosen, nor to keep them but firmly tied, because [...] her guards had attempted to rape her a number of times.”

On May 24, she was shown the scaffold where she would be burned. She put on a woman’s dress and signed a document renouncing her Voices; expecting to be taken to a church and to be allowed to receive the Eucharist. Instead, she was taken back to the English prison. She returned to wearing male clothing, and the accusation of her heresy returned. On May 28, she declared that she had been wrong to have signed the document. Two days later, she was burned at the stake before hundreds of laity, clergy, soldiers, and dignitaries. Fixing her eyes on the cross that she’d requested be held in front of her, she cried out for forgiveness of her sins and of her enemies. A royal secretary exclaimed, “We are lost: we have burned a saint!”

It is fitting that Joan was canonized in 1920 victoriously as a virgin, in keeping with the name she chose for herself, “La Pucelle,” as a tribute to her love for [the Virgin Mary], and as a sign of the Church’s belief from the time of St. Augustine that no violence against a woman, no rape, can destroy a person’s purity, rob them of their spiritual virginity and personal dignity.
– Sr. Ann W. Astelle

St. Joan of Arc, pray for us!

For Reflection

- What struck you most about Joan?
- How does her life inspire you to live your daily life?

Watch the companion video & listen to the audio discussion of what this saint can teach us, at our website!

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Sources include: Transcript of her trial, Butler’s *Lives of the Saints*, Delaney’s *Pocket Dictionary of Saints*, Ann W. Astelle’s “God, Country, and Joan of Arc”



St. Jeanne d'Arc

Virgin & Martyr

Born: January 6, 1412

Died: May 30, 1431

Canonized: May 16, 1920 by Benedict XV

Feast: May 30

In the 1400s, France was weary. Its mentally-ill King Charles VI had died, and a civil war was underway to determine the throne’s rightful successor. England’s troops had invaded France; its princes were sons of French nobility, and eager to secure the crown. Political turmoil plagued the Church, too,

which was divided and wrought with corruption.

In the small village of Domrémy, husband and wife Jacques d’Arc and Isabelle Romee bore a daughter into their farming home on the Feast of the Epiphany—the feast celebrating God’s revelation to the greater world in the face of the innocent infant Jesus. Jacques and Isabelle named their child Jeanne (translated as Joan, a feminine form of the name John).

The family raised five children, with Joan and her sister Catherine trained at the spindle and in sewing. Joan would confidently say, “In sewing and spinning, I fear no woman.” Acquaintances testified, “She was so good, all the village loved her.” Even as a girl and adolescent, she was kind and thoughtful, showing concern and care for her sick neighbors, and she received the sacraments often. Although she could not read or write, she knew well basic prayers that her mother had taught the children. War had affected their family especially when they had to flee the invasion of Domrémy. Their village was plundered at least once, if not more.

When Joan was thirteen, she experienced a voice accompanied by “a great light.” She recognized it as an angel. “This Voice has always guarded me well,” she testified, “and I have always understood it; it instructed me to be good and to go often to Church [...] It said to me: ‘Go, raise the siege which is being made before the City of Orleans. Go!’ it added, ‘to Robert de Baudricourt, Captain of Vaucouleurs: he will furnish you with an escort to accompany you.’” She would later identify her heavenly counselors as St. Margaret (of Antioch), St. Catherine (of Alexandria) & Archangel Michael.

By the time she was sixteen, she left home for her uncle's house, where she stayed for eight days. When she told him, "I must go to Vaucouleurs," he took her. Joan's Voice led her to identify the Captain, who twice refused to speak with her. Joan protested to her insistent Voice that she was a poor girl who didn't know a thing about riding or fighting, but upon hearing the response, "It is God who commands it," she went for a third try. This time, the Captain provided her with an escort, just as the Voice had said.

On went this miraculous string of events, and the peasant girl was given a Knight, a Squire, and four servants. She dressed as a man, which she testified was necessary and that her counsel had agreed it was good to do; perhaps for the sake of the men who accompanied her, but also for her own safety among soldiers. After staying in an Abbey and attending Mass, she and her escort went to see the Dauphin, son of the deceased King Charles the Mad.

To test whether this Joan had truly been sent by God, the Dauphin disguised himself as a courtier, and stood in the royal chamber among the many courtiers present. Thanks to her guiding Voice, Joan immediately went to him and bowed down, embraced his knees, and said, "God give you a happy life, sweet King!" He claimed that he was someone else, but eventually admitted his true identity. The two had a private conversation during which Joan revealed some secrets to him. No one knows what she said, but it inspired the Dauphin's confidence in her. He had Joan interrogated more than three weeks by theologians who concluded: "In her, Joan, we find no evil but only good, humility, virginity, devotion, honesty, and simplicity."

With that, seventeen-year-old Jeanne d'Arc was equipped with white armor and a standard; a white flag bearing the names of Jesus & Mary to which she had tremendous devotion, and a representation of God to whom two kneeling angels presented a fleur-de-lis—symbol of France, of Mary, and of virginity. Joan called herself "La Pucelle," The Maid, or Virgin. Her Voice instructed her that a sword would be found behind the altar at a certain church, which it was—five crosses engraved on it. Though she chose not to use it, she kept it.

For seven months, the city of Orléans had been besieged. Joan arrived on April 29, 1429. She first warned the English by way of letters to leave. Then, on May 4, she led the French to capture the most intimidating English fortress. She vowed not to fight or put on armor the next day, the Feast of the Ascension. Instead, she dictated a note which was fastened to an arrow and shot into the English lines, warning them to abandon their forts. They received it by insulting and degrading her, and she began to sigh and weep and call on the "King of Heaven" to help her.

On May 6, Joan exclaimed, "In the name of God! let us go on bravely!" and the English Fortress of the Augustines was captured. That evening she requested that her chaplain stay close to her the next day, as she prophesied "tomorrow blood will flow from my body, above my breast." Joan was the first to set a ladder against the fortress on May 7, and was wounded by a crossbow bolt. When someone offered to apply a charm to heal her wound, she replied, "I would prefer to die rather than to do something I know to be a sin, or against the will of God." She returned to the battlefield, inspiring the French soldiers to end what had been a seven-month siege.

Joan would necessarily sleep among the soldiers. They testified to never feeling lust for her; her very presence deterring sinful thoughts. One said, "Her words put me on fire, inspiring in me a love for her that was, I believe, divine." Joan had the priests who accompanied them carry a banner of the crucified Christ, and twice daily sing Marian hymns. Joan accompanied them, but forbade any soldiers from participating if they had not confessed their sins. She was adamant that her troops conduct themselves in virtue. One who became her friend was John II of Alençon, a French Duke and former prisoner of war who had sold all he had to the English as his ransom. He and Joan conducted a successful military campaign on the Loire River. Although a brave leader, she was seen weeping for war victims—enemy and ally.

In March 1429, Joan had prophesied that the Dauphin would be crowned in four months' time. He was, on July 17. This was one of her many prophecies. After the coronation, however, his support for Joan seemingly disappeared. Her military campaigns began to fail. In Paris, she received an arrow in the thigh, and was dragged out of harm's way by d'Alençon. In May 1430, at Compiègne, she was dragged from her horse and became a prisoner of the Burgundians, who sold her to the British for a great sum of money.

As biographer Alban Butler points out, the British could not condemn her to death for defeating them in battle, but they could have her sentenced as a sorceress and a heretic. It was not uncommon for women to be accused of witchcraft; witch hunts have taken place throughout history and across the globe when women step outside normal roles, into positions of influence.

Joan was chained and watched day and night by guards who slept both in and outside of her cell. Twice, she attempted to escape. Her trial began on January 9, 1431. She endured relentless interrogation, public and private—mental torture of the same questions over again, sleep deprivation, humiliating physical examinations to ascertain her virginity, violations of the seal of confession, and her captors threatened to torture her painfully.