

# First Mass In Cayuga Offered 300 Years Ago, Indian Chief Invited Jesuits

(Continued from Page 1)

the Hurons and the slaves, but also among the natives of the country."

Shortly after the construction of the chapel, Father Chaumonot left Cayuga and proceeded on his journey to the Senecas. Father Menard thus became the first resident priest among the Cayugas. In contrast to their earlier hostility, these Indians, who were the least savage of the Iroquois, soon manifested a subdued spirit to the missionary. Gradual gains were made despite the subtle influences of the enemies of the Church, and the chapel was the scene of daily baptisms of both children and adults, as well as the regular instructions of the catechumens who were very numerous.

FATHER MENARD was very careful in his letters to make particular mention of the first two adults he baptized. One, a man eight years old, was given the grace of Faith while listening to the missionary's instructions. Two days later, he was taken suddenly ill and, being very close to death, asked to be baptized.

The other man was the first adult to receive baptism in the newly erected chapel. His Christian name was Lazarus. Father Menard wrote of Lazarus:

"Perhaps these graces, which God has wrought in him, are the

fruits of the charity that he manifested for Fathers Brebeuf and Lallemant some time before. He told me that he was a witness of their death, and having by his valor acquitted himself with credit among his fellow warriors on that same day in which he had slain with his own hand eight Hurons and taken five other prisoners, he had pity on these two captive Fathers and had bought them of the Mohawks by two beautiful wampum belts with the design of returning them to us in safety, but that soon their captors gave back to him these pledges, he claimed their prisoners, and burned them with all imaginable fury."

Lazarus the first adult baptized in the first Catholic chapel by the first priest apostle to the Cayugas is a direct link between Catholicism in Cayuga County and two of the North American martyrs St. John de Brebeuf and St. Gabriel Lallemant.

Father Menard was a personal friend of many of the Jesuit martyrs, especially St. Isaac Jogues and St. John de Brebeuf. The latter had also at one time been a missionary co-laborer of Father Chaumonot. The case of Lazarus, however, Father Menard seems to stress as an instance of bringing very close to home the beautiful thought of Tertullian: "The

blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church."

Father Menard, who knew both the Algonquin and Huron tongues, learned the Iroquois language from three brothers to whom the missionary in turn taught the truths of our religion. Facility in using the native tongue of the Cayugas greatly helped the zealous priest. The children also became his little apostolic angels, helping him in every way, introducing him into cabins and to families, waiting for him wherever he stopped, giving him the names of the children he had baptized, and countless other aids in his work. These early days, it must not be forgotten, were also dangerous ones for the priest. His life was constantly in danger, and he was threatened with death more than once. Despite all obstacles, however, the Faith flourished. Father Menard was able to report to his superiors: "I am listened to attentively everywhere. Our chapel is filled with catechumens, and, finally, I daily baptize both children and adults."

After two months, however, Father Menard was recalled to the Jesuit headquarters at Onondaga. Saonchiowaga and other of his fields later invited him to return and he was received this time with the utmost courtesy. To his surprise, he found his chapel just as he had left it. In fact on the very day of his arrival, he was able to hold devotions. At this time, Father Menard recorded that the zeal of his converts and catechumens was so great that the Church of Cayuga was not less promising than that of Onondaga.

UNFORTUNATELY, he was unable to remain at Cayuga a

for only about a year because the Jesuits were forced to abandon their Iroquois missions. For Father Menard, leaving Cayuga was a great personal grief. The Jesuit Relations describe his feelings:

"Thus was he forced to abandon this beautiful harvest, the first fruits of which he had offered to Heaven in the death of many little ones and also of adults whom he had baptized. It was like taking his heart from his body or tearing a loving mother from her children."

Father Menard was regarded as second to none for devotion and tact among his co-laborers. The Jesuit Relations comment further: "His courage was equal to his zeal. He had seen without fear the Iroquois rushing upon us for all my past hardships."

Others in the same place had lifted their hatchets to cleave his skull, but he preserved his calmness. This generous Father gladdened the hearts of the Iroquois by his very presence. He might give birth to this Iroquois church founded by him and which in a short time grew to the number of 400 Christians with the hope of converting the rest of the entire bourg had he not been stopped by the mist of this work."

were good reasons for his asking to be relieved of his assignment, but this he refused to do. He had a premonition of death as he set out on this final journey for the West, for he advised a close priest-friend: "In three or four months you may add my name to the memento of the dead."

THE CRUELTY of the Ottawas was greater than he had ever previously known. In early autumn 1661, they left him and three Indian aides to starve after they had entered Lake Superior when their canoe had been crushed by a falling tree.

On Oct. 15, some less cruel Ottawas befriended them, and Father Menard was able to reach a bay on Lake Superior's south shore. Here he established the Mission of St. Teresa, whose feast day it was, and he also wrote from this place: "Here I had the consolation of saying Mass which repaid me with usury for all my past hardships."

John Gilmory Shea describes Father Menard's plight at this time: "The aged priest stood alone in the heart of the continent with no fellow priest and scarcely a fellow man of European race within a thousand miles."

His missionary labors here were confined chiefly to the aged and infirm for few of the others would bother to hear him. His converts were so well instructed, however, and so well tested that Father Marquette and later westward missionaries subsequently found his converts faithful and firm in the religious teachings of the Ottawa and the Father Menard had implanted in their souls.

Father Fremus, writing from Cayuga in 1668, also offered this

tribute: "I had the leisure, in the meanwhile, to tarry some days at this mission where I was witness of the faith and courage of the earlier Christians whom the late Father Menard had himself baptized."

AFTER EIGHT months at the St. Teresa Mission, he received a call from some destitute Catholic Hurons to visit them. Against the advice of everyone, he set out on this dangerous journey for the bay of Chegoirnegoh on Lake Superior, by way of Keweenaw Lake. When he was preparing to leave, he said: "God calls me further, I must go, should it cost me my life. This is the finest opportunity of showing to the angels and men that I love my Creator more than the life I hold from Him, and you wish me to let it slip."

He left on July 13, 1661. On the way, he was abandoned by his guides with one faithful exception. Coming to some dangerous rapids, the two separated, and Father Menard left the canoe with his equipment to lighten

the load, while the guide proceeded alone to negotiate the descent.

After safely passing the rapids, the guide looked in vain for the missionary, even firing his gun as a signal, but to no avail. The guide himself became lost and finally reached a nearby village after two days. With difficulty, he tried to explain his plight and the loss of Father Menard, hoping to obtain their help. At this point, however, the village was attacked by an enemy tribe, rendering utterly futile any possibility of an organized search. Father Menard was never seen again. His fate is a mystery. From time to time, parts of his altar equipment and possessions were found among the Dakotas and other western tribes, but no definite details were ever ascertained relative to his fate.

Dr. Charles G. Hawley of Auburn, a prominent Protestant historian, closes his chapter on Father Menard with this tribute:

"But whatever doubt there may hang over the circum-

stances of his death, none can rest upon the sincerity and fervor of his apostolic zeal or the heroism of his self-sacrifice whether the lot fell to him to be the first to plant the Cross among the Cayugas or to bear it to the nations not less fierce that dwell by the great maritime lakes of the distant West."

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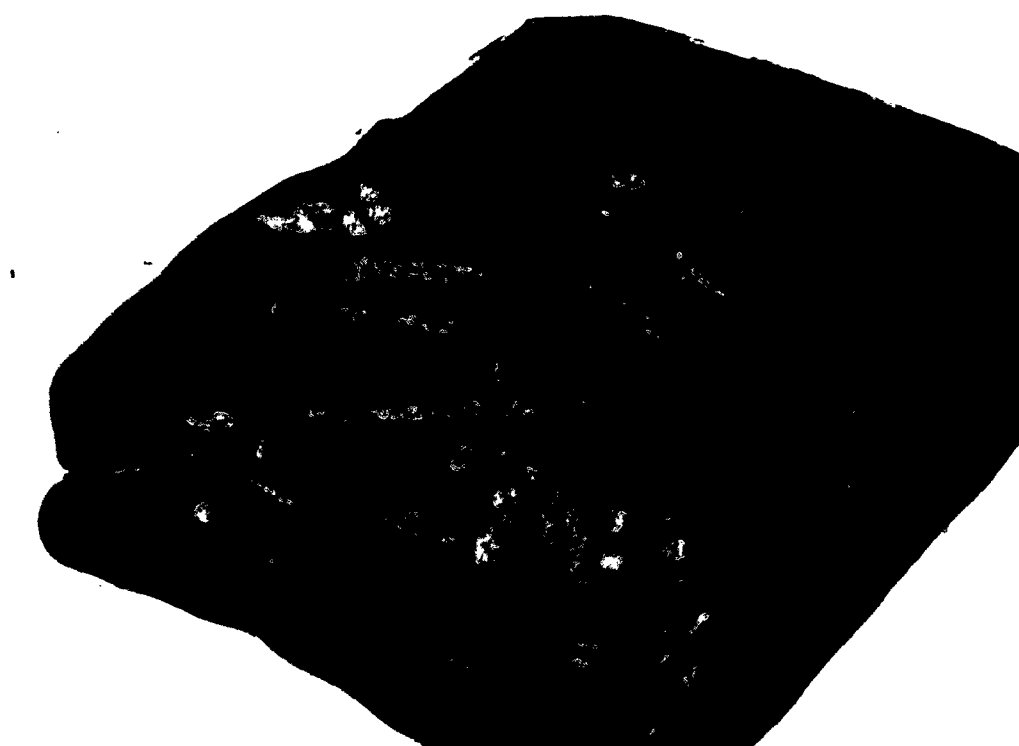
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