

- This coming Friday the Church celebrates the Feast of the North American Martyrs: St. John de Brebeuf, St. Isaac Jogues, and their companions - Jesuit missionaries who came to North America in the 17th century to evangelize the Native Americans.
- This summer, while in Canada, I had the opportunity to visit and pray at the tomb of St. John de Brebeuf, whom I've long admired.
- What I admire about Brebeuf and St. Isaac Jogues is the way they gave up absolutely everything in order to serve Christ, leaving behind their families, their countries, and all material comforts in order to be missionaries in the New World.
- Working amongst the Hurons and a few other tribes, these brave men endured incredible deprivations and hardships and eventually were cruelly tortured and martyred by a band of Mohawk Indians.
- After being beaten and burned and having his fingers gnawed down to the bone and some of them cut off, St. Isaac Jogues was killed with a tomahawk to the head.
- Likewise, St. John de Brebeuf was mercilessly tortured with beatings and burnings, even having his eyes burned out with a flaming torch before he died of his wounds. To the amazement of his torturers, he never cried or asked for mercy in his tortures.
- As we consider their lives of heroic service and their deaths as martyrs, we may be tempted to ask ourselves what we are willing to give up in order to follow Christ.
- Are we willing to give up everything: our loved ones and our homes, our comfort and our dignity, our way of life and the autonomy to do as we please, our sense of safety and security, and even our very lives?
- Could we give it all away for Christ and His glory?
- Yet I can tell you that men of such sturdy character as Jogues and Brebeuf did not waste much time thinking about what they had given up when they set sail for the New World. Rather, they were looking at what they were gaining!
- They understood that in giving their lives away to serve the Native Americans they were gaining souls for Christ.
- In fact, after baptizing a dying Indian child, John de Brebeuf once exclaimed: "For this one single occasion I would travel all the way from France; I would cross the great ocean to win one little soul for Our Lord!"
- Yet in giving their lives away to those who tortured and martyred them, Jogues and Brebeuf knew that they were gaining for themselves an eternity in Heaven. They were gaining Christ, and nothing mattered more to them. Christ was their prize!
- Our readings today are challenging, especially our Gospel. It's particularly challenging for those of us who have more than enough of this world's goods.
- We hear the story of the rich young man who is zealous in keeping the Commandments, but who cannot part with his possessions in order to follow Christ.
- In response we hear Jesus say, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" He says, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."
- Our readings today also warn us of the impending judgment we will all face.

- As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us today, God sees all things. None of us can hide from Him; all of us are naked and exposed before Him. He knows everything about us, even our most hidden thoughts.
- While this should instill some amount of healthy fear within us, to be “good” simply because we fear damnation is certainly an imperfect way to live.
- No, my brothers and sisters, when we think about the judgment we must all face one day, we must look to the saints so they can show us how we must prepare for it.
- The saints were people in love with Christ! It was love that impelled them to live and die as they did – not fear of hell and damnation.
- Love: love for God and for neighbor is what enabled them to pass through the eye of the needle of God’s scrutiny to enter Heaven.
- Furthermore, today’s Gospel teaches us we can only get to Heaven if we are free from sin and worldly attachments. This is why it is so hard to enter the Kingdom of God!
- While it is God’s mercy that ultimately opens Heaven’s gates for us, we must do our part by learning to love as the saints loved, and by ridding ourselves of our attachments to sin and to the things of this world. This is where things get difficult!
- If we wish to be free of sin and attachments to worldly things, the saints teach us that we must first learn to be humble, to be poor in spirit. Think of the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”
- To be poor in spirit is to recognize one’s need for God mercy rather than relying upon one’s own merits. It is a form of humility. And poverty of spirit, or humility, helps us to know our true state before God – and how much God loves us.
- Knowing how sinful we are, of how we have offended God, and how much God loves us anyway leads us to loving God and desiring to serve Him and His kingdom. It helps us to turn to God with generosity of heart.
- Humility also makes it possible for us to know God, for this virtue turns our eyes away from ourselves to Him Who is so much greater. And in knowing God, we are given the desire to pursue Him in love. And this is really the heart of the matter.
- The rich young man couldn’t follow Christ because he was too focused on himself. His problem was not so much a sin of greed as it was self-centeredness.
- His problem was an inability to recognize Christ as God. He was too focused on himself to be focused on God. Thus, he couldn’t part with his possession because he didn’t know what, or rather Whom, he would be gaining.
- As we compare the rich young man with the North American Martyrs – or any saint for that matter – the difference we find is that the rich young man lived a life focused on himself, while the saints all lived God-centered lives.
- So in addition to being free from sin and an attachment to worldly goods, we must also be free of attachment to ourselves! We must learn to be God-centered rather than self-centered, for this is what makes us humble enough to enter Heaven.
- This is the choice we must make: will we live our lives for ourselves: for our own comfort and security, following our own will; or will we live it for God, loving Him with all our mind, heart, soul, and strength, and loving our neighbors as ourselves?
- Can we turn our gaze away from ourselves and our own desires in order to seek God and His will? Can we spend our lives in seeking God’s glory rather than our own?

- My brothers and sisters, we will never be truly happy and peaceful in this life as long as we're overly concerned about ourselves – for true happiness and lasting peace can only be found in Jesus Christ.
- May we each learn to forget about ourselves and worry about only what God wills for us. St. John de Brebeuf, St. Isaac Jogues, and the North American Martyrs, pray for us!