

## Reflection based on the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles 5: 17-28

Only forty –five minutes from Troy is a shrine dedicated to seventeenth century French missionaries who suffered death as a result of preaching the faith to Native Americans. It is the Shrine of the North American Martyrs. One of those who wears the crown of martyrdom is St. Isaac Jogues. This saintly priest fell victim to the Hurons, a tribe of Native Americans. According to one Fr. Jogues was captured and later subjected to hideous torture, including severe beatings and the mutilation of three of his fingers. So badly damaged was his health that he was compelled to return home to his native France for a period of rest and recuperation.. Undeterred, he soon begged his bishop for the opportunity to once more return to North America. The bishop consented to his request. Showing remarkable courage, the zealous saint returned, only to be tomahawked to death by his former captors.

The background for today's first reading is the second arrest of the apostles for preaching the gospel. The religious authorities of Israel had strictly ordered them to abstain from teaching in the name of Jesus, and they refused. Their refusal cost them their freedom. They were thrown in the public jail after their brazen act of disobedience. You might think that they would have abandoned their mission. Nope. As soon as they are miraculously freed, they return to the temple to preach to the people. Clearly the apostles placed themselves in harm's way. But they were bound and determined to continue their mission and give honor and praise to the Lord who called them.

As one biblical scholar remarks, "Whereas the elders of Israel charge the Apostles not to speak about Christ, God, on the other hand, does not allow them to remain silent".

Obedience to God must come first. Peter and the other apostles insisted that "they must obey God rather than men"( Acts 5:29) Their personal safety was not an issue for the apostles. They simply desired to do what was expected of them by the Lord himself.

The purpose of this story, a true adventure, is to paint vividly the fearless confession of Christ by all of the apostles. In view of their desertion of Christ on the morning of his death, their presence in the temple is astonishing. They were truly Spirit-driven.

What a difference the Spirit of the Risen Christ makes in our life! If only we respond in faith to his marvelous gifts can we possibly imitate those brave and determined men who, unafraid, preached the gospel in the very place they were arrested.