

## **Saint of the Week: Joan of Arc (1412-1431)**

*Observed 30 May*



Joan of Arc is an unqualified national heroine of France, but her status as a saint is less universally acknowledged. During her life, there was an ongoing violent dispute about the right to the French throne. Henry V of England claimed the right to it through the female line, which was denied by the French who favored the House of Valois. After Henry's great victory at Agincourt, immortalized in Shakespeare's play, a pact was signed allowing the Valois Charles to be king until his death, when Henry (who was to marry Charles' daughter) would succeed him. As part of this arrangement, Charles' own son was declared illegitimate by his mother, but he

was regarded as the heir (Dauphin) by many of the French. When both Henry and Charles had died, battles were fought again between those who wanted the throne for Henry's son (Henry VI of England) and those who wanted it for Charles' son (the Dauphin who eventually became Charles VII of France). At this point Joan, a 13-year-old girl from a French village, received visions of Saint Michael the Archangel, as well as Christian martyrs, telling her to lead the French people to oust the English and 'save France'. The circumstances and the motivations of others seem entirely political and nationalistic, but to Joan her voices were speaking the will of God. In her conviction she was able to rouse a substantial army, defeat the English at Orleans (hence her popular title 'the Maid of Orleans'), and convince the Dauphin to claim his throne. She won more battles and succeeded in having the Dauphin crowned king, but he lacked her conviction and military courage. In her effort to free Paris from the English, Joan was captured. She was put on trial for sorcery and heresy, condemned, and burned at the stake. After her death, the French finally won the war and expelled the English from their land. A quarter of a century later, King Charles convinced the Pope to examine Joan's trial, which was entirely politically motivated and filled with falsehoods. The Pope declared her innocent and a martyr for the faith. She has always been revered in France and was ultimately canonized in 1920. Her canonization was not a recognition of the reality of her voices or the legitimacy of her call from God, but of her faithful obedience to God's will for her life as she understood it in the face of great suffering and personal peril.

*Lessons* Judith 8:32-9:11; Psalm 144:1-12; II Corinthians 3:1-6; Matthew 12:25-30

*Collect* Holy God, whose power is made perfect in weakness: we honor you for the calling of Jeanne d'Arc, who, though young, rose up in valor to bear your standard for her country, and endured with grace and fortitude both victory and defeat; and we pray that we, like Jeanne, may bear witness to the truth that is in us to friends and enemies alike, and, encouraged by the companionship of your saints, give ourselves bravely to the struggle for justice in our time; through Christ our Savior, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. .