

St. Joan of Arc

Saint Joan of Arc (c. 1412–1431), also known as the "Maid of Orléans," was a French peasant girl who became a national heroine and a Catholic saint for her role in the Hundred Years' War. Believing she was guided by divine voices, she led French armies to critical victories that paved the way for the coronation of King Charles VII, before being captured, tried for heresy, and burned at the stake at the age of 19.

Early Life and Divine Calling

She was born around 1412 in Domrémy, a village in northeast France, to tenant farmers Jacques d'Arc and Isabelle Romée. Around age 13, she began hearing voices and seeing visions she identified as St. Michael the Archangel, St. Catherine of Alexandria, and St. Margaret of Antioch. These figures instructed her to live a virtuous life, drive the English out of France, and see that the Dauphin (the heir to the throne, Charles VII) was rightfully crowned at Reims.

Military Campaigns

In 1429, after multiple attempts, she gained an audience with Charles VII at Chinon. Legend states she recognized him in a crowd despite his disguise and shared a secret known only to him to prove her divine mandate. Charles gave her armor and an army, and she successfully lifted the English siege of Orléans in just nine days, a victory that significantly boosted French morale. Following further victories, she escorted Charles through enemy territory to Reims, where he was crowned King Charles VII on July 17, 1429, with Joan standing by his side with her banner.

Capture and Trial

In May 1430, while defending the town of Compiègne, Joan was captured by Burgundian forces (allies of the English) and later sold to the English government for 10,000 livres. She was tried in Rouen before a biased pro-English church court led by Bishop Pierre Cauchon. She faced approximately 70 charges, including heresy, witchcraft, and the "crime" of cross-dressing (wearing men's clothing), which she maintained was necessary for her protection and as part of her divine mission. After a complex trial where she defended herself with remarkable eloquence, she was found guilty of relapsed heresy and burned at the stake on May 30, 1431.

Legacy and Sainthood

Twenty-five years after her death, a retrial ordered by Pope Callixtus III declared her innocent and formally recognized her as a martyr. Joan was beatified in 1909 and canonized as a saint by Pope Benedict XV on May 16, 1920. She is the patron saint of France, soldiers, and prisoners. Her feast day is celebrated on May 30.