

**Life**

Saint Joan of Arc was born in 1412 in the small village of Domremy in Champagne, France to pious parents. Like the village girls at that time, she learned sewing and spinning but did not know how to write. She was devout since she was a child and often knelt in the church to pray attentively, took care of the sick, and entertained the poor. She grew up during the Hundred Years' War between England and France. At that time, due to civil wars in France, the country was at odds. The British invaded France, and France was defeated. The new king, Charles VII, who had not yet been crowned, was depressed and drank every day to relieve his sorrow. When Joan was 13 years old, she began to hear voices and gradually received orders from her visions to assist Charles in becoming the king and defending the French territory. Joan of Arc initially refused because she regarded herself as just a village girl who didn't know how to ride a horse and fight. After she was convinced that it was God's holy will, the 17-year-old responded bravely. Charles first asked a group of theologians to question her to make sure that she was a good Christian and not practising sorcery. Then she gained military power.

At that time, most of France had been captured, and the last fortress, Orléans, was also heavily surrounded by the British army. Joan of Arc first proposed to the King of England that two Christian nations to achieve justice and peace in the name of Jesus and Mary, but was rejected and ridiculed. So Joan of Arc specially made a military banner with the names of "Jesus, Mary", the face of the Holy Father, as well as kneeling angels holding lilies painted on it. She galloped on the battlefield wearing men's clothing and led the French army to win consecutive battles. In 1427, Charles VII was crowned with her support. In 1431, Joan of Arc was captured during a battle but Charles VII did not rescue her. She was sold to the British army. Because she could not be sentenced as a prisoner of war, Joan of Arc was tried as a heretic. In France, pro-British bishops and theologians held a trial in the ecclesiastical court. During the trial many legal procedures were violated. For example, although she was illiterate, she had no advocate. Joan's request for the Pope to intervene was also rejected. Furthermore, Joan was not imprisoned in an ecclesiastical prison supervised by women, but in a civilian prison guarded by British soldiers. Joan of Arc continued to wear men's clothing in order to protect her chastity, which also became one of the evidences of her heresy for cross-dressing. In the end, Joan of Arc was convicted of heresy. When she was burned at the stake, she looked at the cross of Jesus and recited His holy name. She was only 19 years old when she was burned to death. The case was retried about 25 years later, and the Holy See acquitted her. There are a number of books and movies of revisionist theories about Joan of Arc which contradict the established account of her life, so we must be careful to identify them.

**Reflection**

Saint Joan of Arc was not martyred for her faith; she was a victim of political persecution. The British needed to get rid of her to weaken the morale of the French people. The pro-British French theologians exerted pressure during the interrogation to achieve this goal. After the public audience on January 26, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI elaborated on the life of St. Joan of Arc and what we can learn from it. He pointed out that "One of the most original aspects of this young woman's holiness was precisely this link between mystical experience and political mission...The liberation of her people was a work of human justice which Joan carried out in charity, for love of Jesus. Her holiness is a beautiful example for lay people engaged in politics, especially in the most difficult situations. Faith is the light that guides every decision."

In addition, St. Joan of Arc was also subjected to gender persecution. During the interrogation period, she was held in an environment where she was threatened with rape. In modern times, there are still incidents of bullying because of gender, especially in some countries, such as India where women face serious safety issues. Rape has become almost normalized and a means for men's rights advocates to intimidate women into silencing them. As Christians, let us be more concerned about social justice and pray for the victims.

**Prayer**

Pope Benedict XVI said at the event mentioned above: "Dear brothers and sisters, the name of Jesus, invoked by our Saint until the very last moments of her earthly life was like the continuous breathing of her soul, like the beating of her heart, the centre of her whole life". Let us learn from St. Joan of Arc and call on the name of Jesus especially when we are suffering.

May we learn from the example of St. Joan of Arc and call upon the name of Jesus as the center of our souls. We also pray for our brothers and sisters who are subjected to political or gender persecution. St. Joan of Arc, pray for us.