

## **Day 252 - Friday, November 27, 2020**

As our country is suffering under COVID 19 perhaps it is time to pray to another Canadian saint

### St. [François de Laval](#)

(Born on (30 April 1623 – died 6 May 1708).

First Bishop of Québec. Beatified on June 22, 1980.

Declared a saint by [Pope Francis](#) on April 3, 2014.

His feast day is celebrated on May 6.

The French prelate François Xavier de Laval (1623-1708) was the first bishop of Quebec. He has been called the father of the [Roman Catholic Church](#) in Canada. He was born on April 30, 1623, in Montigny-sur-Avre (Eure-et-Loir), France. He was one of eight children of Hugues de Laval and Michelle de Péricord. His father, who possessed considerable estates, traced his descent from the illustrious Laval family and also from the Montmorencys, for centuries one of the leading noble families of France. The atmosphere in the lordly family château was one of piety. One son became a Benedictine abbot; one daughter, superior of a convent. At the age of 8 François began 10 years of literary and philosophical studies at La Flèche, the best Jesuit college in the country, where he was a good student. While there he developed his lifelong attachment to the Jesuits. From his contacts with Jesuit missionaries returned from Canada and from his reading of the Jesuit Relations grew an early interest in the foreign missions.

Destined for the Church by parental wish and by his own inclination, François received the tonsure at the age of 8. When his father died in 1636, his maternal uncle, who was bishop of Évreux, named him a canon in his cathedral. In 1641 the youthful canon started his theological studies in Paris at the Jesuit College of Clermont. These were interrupted for 18 months, when he returned to Montigny in 1645, subsequent to the deaths in battle of his two elder brothers, and put the family's affairs in order. Disregarding the pleas of his mother and of the bishop of Évreux that he marry and perpetuate the Laval name, he returned to Clermont and was ordained in 1647.

As a priest, Laval soon became known for his zeal, diligence, practical talents, prudence, and piety. His fulfillment of the then arduous duties as archdeacon of the diocese of Évreux (1648-1654) gave promise of his rapid rise in the French Church. During these years he served as president of the Bons Amis, a group of priests and laymen which met in Paris to advance in spirituality and to engage in works of mercy.

In 1654 Laval resigned as archdeacon and joined the Hermitage in Caen. Between 1654 and 1658 he dwelt in Caen intermittently, as he continued to do with the Bons Amis in Paris. At the urging of Alexandre de Rhodes, S. J., the apostle of Vietnam, Laval was destined for Tonkin as vicar apostolic, but the project fell through in 1654.

Instead, Laval went to the no less arduous mission to Canada as its first vicar apostolic, but only after a considerable controversy. Laval was consecrated bishop on Dec. 8, 1658, and landed in Quebec on June

Bishop Laval's huge vicariate embraced all of [New France](#). His flock consisted of some 2,200 French colonists dwelling along the St. Lawrence River, situated mostly around Quebec, with smaller concentrations around Trois-Rivières and Montreal, plus an indefinite but probably smaller number of converted aborigines. After protracted efforts by Laval, which involved him in a return voyage to France (1671-1675), the vicariate was raised in 1674 to the status of a diocese, immediately subject to the [Holy See](#), and not suffragan to Rouen as [Louis XIV](#) long insisted.

Laval succeeded in maintaining close relations with the clergy and the government, though not without friction, as he set out without delay to assert episcopal authority in a region without experience of it. While resisting stoutly intrusions of the civil power into the spiritual, Laval enjoyed unusual political influence. During the bishop's first return to France (1662-1663), King [Louis XIV](#) allowed him to name the new governor of Quebec, consulted him about the political reorganization of [New France](#), and granted him a seat on the new Sovereign Council for Quebec, giving him a role second only to the governor's.

A perennial source of conflict with local officials and business interests was the liquor traffic with the Indians. Horrified by the degrading effects of alcohol on them, Laval excommunicated those who sold intoxicants to the aborigines. When this was pictured as an intrusion into the civil domain, Laval made this topic the main purpose of two voyages to France, in 1662 and 1678; but his victory with the King was only a partial one.

To promote education, Bishop Laval started a primary school in Quebec and the famous school at Saint-Joachim for [arts and crafts](#). More important was the opening in 1663 of the seminary in Quebec, which was affiliated with the newly founded Paris Foreign Mission Society. It was intended to train secular priests and also to serve as a community of priests already ordained. Parish priests were supported by the seminary and turned in to it their revenues; they were encouraged to look on the seminary as their second home and as their place of retirement in old age.

The tall, grave, dignified Laval won the admiration of all for his piety, asceticism, humility, charity, and unremitting pastoral activities, which did not shrink from caring personally for the sick, even the plague-stricken. Declining health caused him to return to France in 1681 and to resign his see in 1688. That same year he returned to Quebec and dwelt there until his death on May 6, 1708.

“Life should NOT be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in an attractive and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in sideways, chocolate in one hand, champagne in the other, body thoroughly used up, totally worn out and screaming “WOO HOO what a ride!” (Hunter S. Thompson)

Sincerely,  
Fr. Jim Kaptein