

## St. René Goupil: the patron saint of anesthesia

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René Goupil (1608–1642) was a French surgeon and lay missionary who travelled with the Jesuits to New France in 1640. Despite developing an illness that rendered him deaf (and thus unable to be ordained a Jesuit), Goupil served at Saint Joseph de Sillery Mission (near Quebec City) and the nearby first Hôtel Dieu de Québec, where he cared for the sick, which included dressing wounds and performing blood letting.<sup>1,2</sup>

In 1642, on a mission to Huron territory, Goupil and his associated group of missionaries were captured by the Mohawk people.<sup>3</sup> Goupil was brutally tortured while in captivity. Despite enduring considerable suffering, when the Mohawk community needed medical assistance, Goupil was first to help “with as much charity as he would have shown the dearest friend.”<sup>4</sup> At a point in time when he knew he was near death, Goupil asked Isaac Jogues, a fellow Jesuit missionary, to anoint him, making him a Jesuit friar. After being seen blessing a Mohawk child with the sign of the cross – misinterpreted by a Mohawk leader as a curse – Goupil was violently killed.

Goupil did not let the unfortunate events of his life define the way he treated others. He was known to be patient, compassionate, and willing to help in any capacity. Canonized in 1930, his selflessness and ability to conduct himself well in difficult times, as well as to relieve pain and



**Figure** A photograph of a statue of St. René Goupil, the patron saint of anesthesia, which resides among a few other small statues representing the “Canadian martyrs” located in the Église de l’Immaculée-Conception in Montreal. This church was directed by Jesuit priests from 1898 to 1999 and can still be visited. Photograph courtesy of Daniel Chartrand

suffering, were the traits noted to justify his becoming the patron saint of anesthetists in 1951.<sup>5</sup>

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