

3. June 2024

**“The Maid of Orleans”  
Part 3: Passion and martyrdom**

For Joan, the hardest part of her mission now came. Now she was to bear the whole burden of the cross, to taste the suffering that no one who is fully at the service of his Lord is spared.

It would not have been enough for the English to simply take Joan captive and then execute her, knowing full well that the French people would have considered her a martyr. This could have even encouraged them in their efforts to continue the liberation of the country! Their aim was therefore to prove publicly that Joan was a heretic and a witch who had achieved her victories through an alliance with the devil. This in turn would have meant that Charles VII had been crowned by the assistance of a witch, which would have invalidated his legitimacy as king and at the same time destroyed the heroic image of the Maiden.

But to carry out this plan, the English needed the Church and its jurisdiction. Bishop Cauchon of Beauvais, a Frenchman on the side of the English, gave himself up for such an unjust trial. The prelate managed to set up a tribunal which would unanimously pursue only one goal: to establish that the so-called "Maid of Orleans" was in reality a heretic and a witch. The young prisoner, just eighteen years old, found herself in the midst of a gruelling and cruel trial: she was confronted by fifty accusing clergymen and theologians who tried by all means to trap her...

*(We hear Joan being paraded in chains)*

*Bishop Cauchon: The most Christian prince and ruler, Our King Henry, has handed her over to us to initiate a trial against her in the matters of faith. So we have invited Joan to appear today!*

*Now Joan! Now Joan, take an oath on the Gospels that you will answer all the questions we ask you truthfully!*

*Joan: I don't know what you want to ask me about. There may be questions I will not answer!*

Bishop Cauchon: *You shall swear to tell the truth in questions concerning the faith.*

Joan: *I swear to speak the truth in questions concerning my origins and everything I have done since I came to France. But as for my divine revelations, I have never spoken about them, nor have I ever entrusted them to anyone but Charles my King. And if you wanted to cut off my head, I would not be able to talk about them, because my secret advisers, my voices, they have forbidden me to do so!*

*If you were well informed about me, you would wish me not to be in your power. I have done nothing that I have not been instructed to do by revelation!*

*Beware, you who call yourselves my judges, for you are burdening yourself with a heavy burden and you are burdening me too much. I have come from God, I have no business here. Send me back to God, from whom I was sent!*

*Beware that you do not judge me badly, for you are putting yourself in great danger and I warn you that if our Lord punishes you, I have done my duty and told you so.*

The sessions of the trial followed each other closely. The prelates wanted to make Joan renounce the heavenly origin of her "voices" and her mission. But since the Maiden remained firm in her conviction that all this came from God, they wanted to force her to submit unconditionally to the judgment of the Church, so that in the end they could simply pass judgment that her revelations were of demonic origin.

A member of the Tribunal: *"Will you submit to the judgment of the Church on earth, in all that you have said and done, be it good, be it evil, especially for crimes and offences of which you have been accused, and in everything concerning the trial?"*

Joan: *I invoke the militant church, provided that she does not ask me to do the impossible. That which I call impossible would mean to deny everything I have said and done - that I recant the apparitions and deny the revelations I have professed and received from God. But I will not recant them for anything in the world. It would be impossible for me. And if the Church were to command me to do the opposite of what God has commanded me, I could never obey.*

*The interrogator: If contrary to this the Church tells you that your revelations are illusions and devilish deception, will you then submit to the Church?*

*Joan: I will invoke Our Lord, whose commandments I will always obey. I am well aware that what is laid down in my trial has happened to me by God's command; it will be impossible for me to do the opposite of what I have done - as I confessed in my trial - by God's command. And if the Church militant were to call on me to do so, I would not call on any man of the world, but on God alone, whose will I have always done.*

*The interrogator: Do you not believe that you must submit to the Church on earth, namely our Holy Father, the Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and other prelates of the Church?*

*Joan: Yes, but I must first obey God! I believe in the Church on earth and that she cannot err nor can she fail. But all my actions and sayings I leave to God, who called me. I submit myself to Him, to Him alone!*

In spite of so many good and wise answers, which often left her judges perplexed; in spite of the fact that she did not fall into even one of the traps set for her, or ever contradicted herself, Joan had no chance of winning the trial. After all, this was not a court that sought the truth, but a court convened by the English, who did not shy away from using reprehensible means for the sake of condemning her as a witch and heretic. For example, when her confession was heard through a hole in the wall, when she was threatened with torture, and her ignorance of matters of jurisdiction was abused...

At the end of this long process, twelve articles of guilt were compiled. All her supernatural apparitions and predictions were condemned as lies and deception. She was accused of fortune telling, vanity, blasphemy, cruelty, suicide attempt (she had once tried to escape from prison by jumping out of the tower window), blasphemy against the saints, idolatry, invoking evil spirits, and committing grave errors of faith. In the end they concluded that she was heretical and stubbornly obdurate.

But Joan remained firm in her conviction:

*If I said that God had not sent me, I would condemn myself. It is the truth that God sent me. (...)*

*Mgr Cauchon: You believe that your voices come from Saint Catherine and from Saint Margaret?*

*Joan: Yes, and from God.*

With this final proclamation, Joan sealed her condemnation to death at the stake!

There is no doubt that this tragic trial represents a dark chapter in the history of the Church, since it was men of the clergy who were responsible for the death of a faithful daughter of the Church. It was they who declared Joan guilty and then handed her over to the secular jurisdiction authority for execution.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> May 1431, the Maid was taken to the market place of Rouen, like a lamb led to the slaughter, to be burned in front of everyone:

*(Joan weeps loudly and calls on God and the saints Virgin Mary, Michael, Catherine and Margaretha and commands beseeches God to take her soul, confesses her faith.)*

*(Concern and weeping in from some listeners)*

*Joan: Oh God come to my help. Jesus, Catherine, Michael. You saints in heaven. Receive my soul. I beg you to stand by me.*

*Father I believe in You, in You Son, in You Holy Spirit and in the Holy Catholic Church. I am a daughter of God.*

*Rouen, Rouen, I fear very much that you will suffer by for my death!*

*More prayers from Joan and voices.*

*Rough voices: How much longer must we wait? Executioner, do your duty!*

*Joan is led to the stake.*

*Joan: My God forgive me for all my faults and sins for the sake of Your love, and also all those who hear me, forgive me! Pray for me. I also forgive you for what you have done to me. O my God! (weeps bitterly!)*

*Joan at the stake: Bring me a cross, who brings me a cross!*

*My voices have not deceived me! They came from God: I have done everything according to His instructions!*

*Bring me a cross from the church and keep it before my eyes!  
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus....*

Joan is dying!

*Finish with singing:*

*Voice from the croud: Woe is me, we killed a saint! If only I were where her soul is!*

It is said that the flames that consumed the pure body of the Virgin Maiden could not burn her heart, which was so inflamed with love for Jesus. No, her voices had not deceived her! They had assured her that she would be set free and achieve a great victory. It was different than from what she had imagined! But her martyrdom in the flames was her most glorious victory.