



7 June 2026
IN HONOR OF ST. JOAN OF ARC
“The trial of shame” (Part 9)

In Rouen, the conditions of the Virgin's imprisonment worsened. Although she should have been held in a church prison under the supervision of women, English soldiers guarded her instead.

The priest Jean Massieu of Rouen described her conditions of imprisonment as follows:

“Joan was imprisoned in the citadel of Rouen in a room on the middle floor of the tower, accessible via eight flights of stairs. There was a bed where she slept, as well as a large wooden block to which an iron chain was attached and used to shackle her. Her feet were shackled. She was chained to a lock mounted on the wooden block. Five despicable Englishmen were assigned to guard her. They desperately wanted Joan dead and mocked her incessantly.”

During the trial, Joan repeatedly complained about this and held Bishop Cauchon responsible. She also often had to defend herself against the assaults of her guards, especially at night.

Before the interrogations of the accused began, preliminary inquiries had been conducted about her, for example in Domrémy and the surrounding villages; however, these did not serve the trial's objective, namely to convict Joan of witchcraft. Joan's reputation was too good to yield any material that spoke against her. The opposite was the case.

Throughout this ill-fated trial, it was clear that any testimony in Joan's favor was suppressed and any compassion or understanding shown was viewed with suspicion and punished.

Joan's last confessor, Martin Ladvenu, described his impressions of the trial as follows:

“I have the impression that some attended the trial out of fear of the English, others to please them. I know Master Nicolas de Houpeville was thrown into the royal prison for refusing to participate in the trial. I also know that Joan had no legal counsel during the proceedings, except toward the end of the trial. No one would have dared to advise or guide her for fear of the English... Ysambert de la Pierre, who once sought to come to Joan's aid, was ordered to remain silent and threatened with being thrown into the Seine if he did not desist from such actions in the future.”

Many other points could be added to underscore the shameful nature of this trial. In particular—and Joan herself pointed this out during her interrogation in Rouen—it should be noted that many questions had already been answered and approved by ecclesiastical authorities during her earlier interrogation before the start of her actual mission.

On February 21, 1431, the first public session of the trial took place, presided over by Bishop Cauchon, the ecclesiastical councilor Jean d'Estivet, the prosecutor Jean de la Fontaine, Master Jean Beaupère, and 43 assessors, including abbots, professors, doctors, and other high-ranking ecclesiastical figures.

Joan showed no sign of intimidation during the many hours of questioning before the tribunal. Encouraged by her saints to answer courageously, she did just that. She, the uneducated woman, proved wise in her answers and, in response to some questions, stated that she first wished to consult with her saints and might answer later.

She astonished some of those present with her memory of what had already been asked and answered. She skillfully avoided the traps set for her, and her answers surprised many with their theological accuracy.

The tribunal's questions repeatedly circled back to her voices, which they sought to identify as phantasms, particularly as diabolical interjections. They tried to prove that by wearing men's clothing, Joan was violating God's commandments. Joan had worn men's clothing ever since she took up military service. She felt safer in these clothes among soldiers, and they were also more suitable for this service. Time and again, they tried to convict her of refusing to submit to the Church, but failed. Joan was willing to follow the Church's guidance. However, she did not reveal matters intended for the king and did not deny her voices.

Ultimately, the aim was to prove that her supernatural revelations were the work of the devil, and they tried to lead her to confess that she had been mistaken and to submit to the Church, which deemed her revelations false. They even showed her instruments of torture. Yet Joan remained unmoved and held fast to her saints. Instead, she warned the bishop of the consequences of his unjust actions:

"You call yourself my judge. I do not know if you are. But beware lest you judge me wrongly, for you are putting yourselves in great danger; and I warn you so that, if our Lord punishes you, I will have done my duty and told you so!"

Joan had to endure six public interrogations, followed by nine private ones, which lasted until March 17. She had hoped to be freed by a great victory promised to her by Saint Catherine, which she understood to mean release from prison.

Joan testified:

“Mostly, my voices told me that I would be freed through a great victory. Afterward, they told me, 'Take everything upon yourself. Do not fear your martyrdom. You will enter paradise in the end!' They assured me of this without fail. I call "martyrdom" the tribulations and hardships I suffer in my prison. I do not know if I must endure more, but I trust in Our Lord.”

The shameful trial was reaching its climax. The charges were prepared, admonitory speeches followed, expert reports were written, and twelve articles of indictment were drawn up. They all had the same goal: to burn the Virgin sent by God as a witch. Joan was about to achieve her greatest victory.

Joan, on her part, was about to achieve her greatest victory.