

## Lessons From Joan of Arc

On Sunday, we continued our study of the lives of several great saints from church history by focusing on St. Joan of Arc.

1. Warm-up Question: At the outset of Sunday's sermon, Jeff mentioned that, with the new worship reservation system, people are assigned seats in the sanctuary. That means people aren't always getting to sit in their "favorite pew." Do you always sit in the same place when you come to church? If so, where? Why are we like that?
2. Joan of Arc is an unusual saint. She only lived to be 19, was convicted of heresy by the church, then burned at the stake. Later she was exonerated by the church and declared a saint. She's also unusual in that she made her name as a warrior. We usually don't think of warriors as saints. But we might have a very different perspective if we, like Joan, ever experienced an enemy invasion. When Joan was a little girl, her village was attacked by English soldiers who raped, pillaged, burned homes, and wantonly killed. Several years later, at age 13, Joan had a vision of St. Catherine (and several other saints) telling her to drive out the English, then escort the rightful heir to the French throne, Louie VII, to the cathedral in Reims for a proper coronation.
  - a. Suppose like Joan, you saw little girls, women, and other innocents being wantonly assaulted and killed, do you think you might sense a holy calling to rise up and fight? Do you think God ever calls us to go to war? If so, how do we reconcile that with Jesus being the Prince of Peace?
  - b. Do you believe God sometimes comes to us in visions? Have you ever experienced a vision or known someone who did? If so, what was the vision?
  - c. Joan was only 13 years old when she experienced her call to liberate France. She came from a peasant family. Plus she was only a girl in an age when women had no power – and the notion of a woman engaging in battle was unthinkable. Yet she immediately began to act on her vision. If you were her, do you think you would have acted or hesitated? Why or why not?
3. Joan's story parallels the experience of Gideon in the Old Testament. Read Judges 6:1-16.
  - a. When Gideon was hiding in the winepress threshing his wheat, what do you suppose was his mental and emotional state?
  - b. When the angel greeted Gideon by saying, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior," what do you suppose he thought and felt?
  - c. Gideon reminded the angel that his clan was the weakest in his tribe and he was the least in his family. Have you ever felt unworthy to embrace something you felt called to do? What happened?

4. After her vision in the garden, Joan convinced a male relative to take her to see a nearby garrison commander. It took two attempts, but she finally managed to convince the commander to give her an armed escort to the king. She told the commander, "I must be at the king's side. . . . There will be no help [for the kingdom] if not from me." Once she got to the king's palace, she said she had a message for him from God. Her message was, "Give me any army and I will save your kingdom and your crown." After weeks of interrogation, the king decided to send Joan to Orleans to lead the battle to break a five month siege. Joan was wounded in battle, but stayed on the battle field exhorting her soldiers. In four days, her forces broke the siege and renewed the hope of her nation. And remember, she was just a teenager. Her boldness, courage, and confidence were amazing.
  - a. The narrator of a documentary on Joan explains her confidence like this: "In a world where God's will is at work, anything is possible." What do you think the narrator meant?
  - b. Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right." Do you buy that?
  - c. Where in your life right now are you feeling called to act with the confidence and hutzpah of St. Joan of Arc? What holds you back?
5. Joan's confidence was not in herself. The kind of confidence she had comes from the deep conviction that God has called me to do something and God will be right there with me guiding and empowering. As the angel said to Gideon, "I will be with you." Judges 6:16. And as Jesus said to us, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:20. In the greatest battle you're facing in life right now, do you have a deep conviction that God is with you? Have you seen any signs of that? In what ways do you feel or sense God's presence in that struggle?
6. Joan was eventually captured by enemy forces, put on trial by the very church she loved, and judged a heretic based on silly theological technicalities. She was burned at the stake, only to be exonerated later by the same church and declared a saint.
  - a. One of the theological criticisms of Joan was that she cut her hair short and dressed like a man. Why do you think that upset so many people?
  - b. Imagine the moments before Joan was burned at the stake. What do you suppose she was thinking and feeling about the church, about God, and about her life?
  - c. Have you ever known the rejection of a church you loved? What happened? How did that feel?
  - d. What lessons, if any, should we draw from Joan's eventual exoneration and sainthood?