



# JOSEPH CHIWATENHWA (C. 1600-1640)

Chiwatenhwa, from Ossossane, a village in Huronia, met the Jesuit missionaries in the area of what is now known as Georgian Bay, Ontario. He was baptized in 1637, took the baptismal name Joseph, and became a lay pastoral worker alongside the missionaries. He taught them his language and helped devise a way of writing it down. Through the Jesuit Relations, or accounts of the missions, he is known to have kept a journal of his spiritual reflections, and a prayer he wrote is also preserved.

Chiwatenhwa's wife, Aonetta, and some of his family were baptized as well, and the Jesuits very much admired the converts' faith. Chiwatenhwa became a parish administrator and lay preacher, working with St. Jean de Brébeuf and the other Jesuit missionaries as they visited the area's villages. He was known to pray constantly and his faith was a powerful witness not only to his own people, but to the missionaries too. In the midst of the tensions between the French and British, which involved their First Nations allies, he was martyred for his faith in 1640.

As a Huron Christian, Chiwatenhwa witnessed to the Gospel message through his own culture and spirituality. In his homily at Martyrs' Shrine on September 12, 1984, Pope John Paul II said of Chiwatenhwa and his family:



Martyrs' Shrine in Midland, Ontario, today.

"These new Christians knew by instinct that the Gospel, far from destroying their authentic values and customs, had the power to purify and uplift the cultural heritage which they had received [...] There can be no question of adulterating the word of God or of emptying the Cross of its power, but rather of Christ animating the very centre of all culture. Thus, not only is Christianity relevant to the Indian people, but Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself Indian."