



FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF FAITH FORMATION
July 30, 2023

Fr. Rale Pilgrimage: 299th Anniversary

Once again, a group of us are gathering in Madison, Maine for the annual Fr. Rale pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is Saturday, August 12. August 23 will mark 299 years since the pastor of the Norridgewock village died alongside his parishioners on those very grounds, choosing to guard their souls and remain with them to the bitter end.

Frequently I am asked why I do this. And when I don't get asked, sometimes I ask myself. Why is the memory of this missionary so important? Why does this history matter? Why are you spending so much time and energy on this? Because Fr. Rale gives me hope for restoration of faith in the state of Maine.

Fr. Rale came to a tribe that was minimally catechized. Their culture was not Catholic; they didn't have the benefit of pious French grandmothers teaching them their prayers from their earliest childhood. They didn't have priests around frequently. The priests they did have were on a circuit. Add the language barrier to that and it would appear to be an insurmountable obstacle.

But Fr. Rale was extremely successful in preaching the faith there. Because he persistently and boldly taught the doctrines of the faith, the tribe was converted (and extremely zealous and devout, I might add.) Their culture hadn't been Catholic, but it was by the time their pastor died. If Fr. Rale could build from scratch like that, we can do the same in Maine today.

Fr. Rale had to operate in a world that was hostile to him. His tribe was at war with the New England colonies. He was opposed because he was affiliated with the Norridgewock, the French, and the Catholic Church. But that didn't scare him away. In the midst of all that turmoil and danger, he stayed with his tribe for 30 years. Many of us feel hostility from the world that surrounds us, but that's no reason to give up the faith or to run away. God will give us the grace to stay the course, and if we do, it will bear much fruit.

Lastly, Fr. Rale was local. This is a man who labored in Maine. He is buried in Maine. The artifacts from his mission are in places like Portland, Skowhegan, and Indian Island. If he could plant the seeds of the Gospel here 300 years ago, we can do it again today. For more information on Fr. Rale go to www.friendsoffrale.org.



—Joe Moreshead