

## The long-lasting memory of the Ursuline Martyrs who were decapitated in 1794



In 2019 the Ursuline Sisters of Saint-Saulve celebrated the 225th anniversary of the Valenciennes martyred sisters with an exhibition and a lecture. On that occasion the reliquary containing their remains has been renovated.

**Valenciennes** : Sister Annie, who was born in December 25th, an Ursuline sister since 1977 has been living at St Saulve community for six years. She used to be more a philosophy teacher than a history teacher but she was seized by a passion for the history of those martyred sisters of Valenciennes. « I was puzzled by the enigma of those women who walked to their death while singing »

As she was trying to answer, she discovered how those women are still talking to us about their life through their death.

### Condemned to death for their exile

On the 17th and 23rd October 1794 eleven Ursulines were decapitated on the parade ground of Valenciennes. What were they blamed for ?

When they were evicted from their convent in 1792, they decided to leave altogether for Mons. In November 1793 they came back to Valenciennes which became an Austrian town, but on September the first 1794, the French took back the town.

In the middle of the French revolution, they had to leave their convent once again when they were arrested and imprisoned until their sentence to death by a military inquiry commission. At the same time seven priests were also condemned to death.

Their bodies were buried at the Saint-Roch cemetery of Valenciennes. When the latter was extended in 1924, five corpses of the martyred Ursulines were discovered and identified. Some remains are being analysed by experts today.

## A reliquary and a calvary



A few years later, Canon Lancelin, the parish priest of Notre Dame du Saint Cordon, ordered a reliquary and offered it to the Ursulines of Saint Saulve in 1942, which has just been given to the diocese of Cambrai so that it can be exhibited in the chapel of Saint-Gery Church.

In the convent garden of Saint Saulve, a calvary and a gravestone with the names of the martyred sisters can be seen in the memory of that dramatic event of 1794.

## The inheritors of the martyrs who have settled in the remains of Notre Dame de la Garde are only eight sisters to live there.

When looking back in the past of the community, sister Annie noted that the Ursulines who excelled in education had been through many hardships since their arrival at Valenciennes in 1654. What is left from the buildings founded at Saint Saulve by the Ursulines who arrived there in 1845 is the old part of St Joseph school. As a matter of fact three quarters of the buildings were destroyed by a fire in 1973

