

She Was Led by the Holy Spirit

Kateri Tekakwitha was born in 1656 at Ossernenon, a Mohawk village in what is now Auriesville, New York. She was the daughter of a Mohawk chief and a Christian Algonquin woman who had come to live among the Mohawks after being captured at Trois Rivieres, Quebec. Kateri was four years old when her parents and little brother died of smallpox. Kateri also contracted the disease, which disfigured her face. Two aunts and an uncle adopted her. The family moved to Caughnawaga, now Fonda, New York. She proved to be an industrious young woman but showed no interest in getting married.

When she was in her teens, Jesuit missionaries came to her village. She was attracted to Catholicism but experienced the opposition of her family

and the tribe. Fr. James de Lamber-ville began to meet with her regularly, teaching her the faith and how to pray and open her heart to God. In her twentieth year, she was baptized on Easter Sunday and was given the name Catherine, or Kateri in the

Mohawk language.

Since the villagers showed so much hostility to her newfound faith, she decided to leave home and go to a Christian colony of Indians near Montreal. There she spent the remaining years

of her life. She promised to remain a virgin. She dedicated her life to prayer, penance, and care for the aged and sick. Every morning at 4 a.m., she arrived at the local chapel for Mass and contemplation. She was devoted to the Eucharist and the mystery of the Cross.

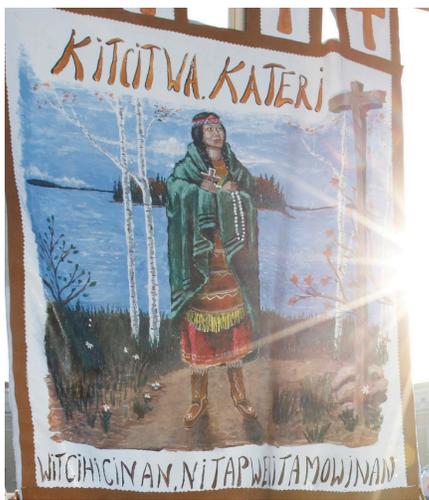
She died on April 7, 1680. Witnesses said her last words were, “Jesus, I love you.” They also testified that the smallpox scars on her face vanished. In death she was radiant and beautiful.

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha is the first North American Indian to be declared Blessed. Her Feast Day is July 14. Along with St. Francis of Assisi, she is the patroness of the environment and ecology. She is popularly known as the “Lily of the Mohawks.”

Pope John Paul II addressed six hundred Native Americans on the occasion of Kateri’s beatification. Noting that Blessed Kateri is a witness to their faith, he said,

You have come to rejoice in the beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha. It is a time to pause and give thanks to God for the unique culture and rich human tradition which you have inherited, and for the greatest gift anyone can receive, the gift of faith. (*L’Osservatore Romano* [June 22, 1980]: 13)

The Holy Spirit works in the hearts of all who are baptized, but the power of his gifts is most evident in the lives of extraordinary witnesses to faith such as Blessed Kateri.¹



Notes:

¹ For more information about Blessed Kateri, see texts from the Tekakwitha Conference National Center reprinted online at www.cin.org.