

Decree
Approved by His Holiness Pope Pius XII
Declaring Heroic
the Virtues of The Servant of God
The Venerable Catharine Tekakwitha

VERY truly is God wonderful in His sanctuaries, but far more wonderful in His saints, "for the saints," as St. Robert Bellarmine aptly remarks (Explan, in Ps. 67), "are God's really genuine sanctuaries" since they are the living temples of the Holy Ghost, Who dwells in them, according to the Apostle: *For you are the temple of the living God, as God saith: I will dwell in them, and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.* (2 Cor. 6, 16.) "*I will dwell in them,*" comments St. Thomas, "*by grace, cultivating them; I will walk among them,*" that is, advancing them from virtue to virtue . . . ; *I will be their God* — protect them by My providence . . . ; *and they will be My people* — *they will worship and obey Me as Mine and as of no other.*" (In Ep. II, ad Cor. lect. III.)

In a special manner God appears wonderful in the Indian Virgin Catharine Tekakwitha, leading her by His grace amidst a people most corrupt and steeped in heathen errors; protecting her by His providence as by a strong shield. On her part grace was not idle, for with her co-operation it led her wondrously to acquire heroic virtues. In the life of this virgin this assuredly stands out vividly.

The celebrated virgin, who is the subject of this decree, was born 1656, at the village of Ossernenon¹ in the Iroquois nation of North America, of the tribe called Agniers by the French, Mohawks by the English, of a pagan father and Christian mother. She was named Tekakwitha. Losing both parents and her brother

¹ Auriesville, New York.

when four years old, she was taken by an uncle very hostile to the Christian religion, and brought up in the manner of her tribe.

When scarcely eight years old she was paired with a boy of her age, not by the rite of marriage, but to grow acquainted with, and marry, him later on. As she approached the time for marriage, Tekakwitha, not yet a Christian, as if by Divine impulse, was so ardent with love for keeping her virginity that she could not by any means be diverted from her heroic resolve even though most cruelly tried by threats and ill-treatment. How trace the origin of such virtue?

"The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians," said Tertulian; no wonder, then, that after the martyrdom of eight missionaries of the Society of Jesus, who were put to death for Christ, between 1642 and 1649, after preaching to the Indians of those regions — among them Saints Isaac Jogues and John de Lalande suffered martyrdom in the very village of Ossernenon — no wonder a white lily should spring up there, flourish marvelously and suffuse with the sweetest fragrance of virtue, first her tribespeople and then the Church.

With peace established between the Indians and French colonists, in 1667, three missionaries of the Society of Jesus were lodged for three days in the home of Tekakwitha's uncle in the village of Caughnawaga,² which was built just after the war. The young girl was assigned to wait on them; and from them, it is easy to believe, she learned the first rudiments of Christian faith. Three years after, a missionary station was established in the same village, though not in the same dwelling.

In the year 1674, Father James de Lamberville, in charge of this mission, was earnestly engaged in teaching the people catechism. The year following, by a strange disposition of Divine Providence, this same missionary unexpectedly came across Tekakwitha. Admiring her exceptional mental gifts and her soul endowed with a Christian sense, he united her, ahead of the catechumens, with the body of the Church by the sacrament of baptism on the holy day of Easter, 1676, naming her Catharine.

After carefully observing the fervent piety of the neophyte, he did all he could to further God's design, by giving her a rule and way for leading a more perfect life, which Catharine began

² Now Fonda, near Auriesville, New York.

to follow most faithfully. This way of life aroused the envy and rage of the enemy of mankind, who strove by manifold temptations to discourage and allure her from the practice of virtue; but calumnies, continued scoldings in her home, ridicule, threats of death and starvation were all in vain, for confiding in God, lest she should lose her faith, this most valiant virgin overcame them all. Prudently, however, reflecting that to remain in that place would expose her faith and morals to too much danger, she took counsel with Father de Lamberville, left home secretly and betook herself to the Mission of St. Francis Xavier at the Sault,³ where there were none but Christ's faithful. There, under the direction of Fathers of the Society of Jesus, she made such progress in the practice of virtue that, contrary to custom, she was permitted to receive for the first time the Body of Christ only twenty months after receiving baptism.

Catharine lived just three years after this, brilliant with the splendor of all the virtues, which in the last days of her life shone forth still more brilliantly. Tormented by violent pain in her whole body, often confined to bed for entire days, and consumed by burning fevers with no relief or comfort, she devoted herself to prayer and contemplation of heavenly things.

Finally on the 17th of April, the fourth day of Holy Week, in the year 1680, fortified by the most holy Body of Christ and Extreme Unction, repeating *Jesus I love Thee*; after a brief agony she breathed forth her most chosen soul.

The reputation for holiness which Catharine had when living spread wonderfully after her death and keeps growing in our day, as appears by the very many letters from every group of the faithful, even from some of no faith, addressed to Pope Pius XI, of happy memory, petitioning that the honors of the blessed be conferred on this virgin, first among the forest peoples of North America.

Observing, therefore, all that is required by the Canons, our most Holy Lord Pope Pius XII signed the Commission for the Introduction of the Cause May 19, A.D. 1939, after receiving and approving the decision of the Historical Section of this Sacred Congregation. Since, moreover, this Cause is historical, waiving

³ La Prairie, Canada.

the Apostolic process, in accordance with the ruling of the Motu Proprio of Pope Pius XI on historical causes, it has all been entrusted to this same Section of ours. After carefully collecting all the documents and weighing them strictly with all its acumen, it drafted a favorable report in a complete and satisfactory statement. All this along with the objections of the R. P. Promoter General of the Faith was submitted for examination at the Antepreparatory Session of this Sacred Congregation before the undersigned Cardinal Proponent, or Relator, of the Cause November 26, 1940; again in the Preparatory Session November 10 the year after; finally in the General Session in presence of our Most Holy Lord June 9, last year. In this Session the Cardinal Relator proposed for discussion this question: *Has it been proved in this instance and for the purpose under consideration that the theological virtues, Faith, Hope, Love of God and neighbor, and the cardinal virtues, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, Fortitude, and their subordinates, were of heroic degree?*

The Most Reverend Cardinals, Official Prelates, and Fathers Consultors gave their votes, on receiving which the Most Holy Father deferred publishing his decision until today in order that after repeated prayer God might deign to bestow on his mind greater light.

Wherefore, having summoned the Cardinal undersigned, the Promoter General of the Faith, R. P. Natucci, and the Secretary, after devout celebration of Mass, His Holiness proclaimed:

It has been proved, in this instance and for the purpose under consideration, that the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, Love of God and neighbor, and the cardinal virtues, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, Fortitude, and subordinate virtues of the Venerable Servant of God, Catherine Tekakwitha, were heroic.

This decree, he has ordered, should be properly promulgated and recorded in the proceedings of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

Given at Rome, January 3, 1943.

C. CARDINAL SALOTTI, *Bishop of Palestrina,*
Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

[L.S.]

A. CARINCI, *Secretary.*