

Homily given by Chet Adams of Detroit, Michigan, at the Holy Mass in honor of the Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha at the Shrine of the North American Martyrs, Auriesville, New York on Sunday, September 2nd, 1973.

On A Clear Day, You Can See Forever.....

In the 17th Century and for many centuries before that, there lived in the beautiful Mohawk Valley a proud and noble people-- the Mohawk Indians, the most powerful and prestigious nation of one of the most formidable Indian confederacies to emerge on the American continent: the Iroquois League or Confederacy, founded under the leadership of the legendary Hiawatha. This Union was forged out of the six neighboring nations: the Senecas, the Oneidas, the Mohawks, the Onondagas, the Cayugas, and the Tuscaroras. They established a centralized governing body of constitutionally defined powers, and renounced war between themselves, and considered an attack upon one of them as war with all under a united command.

The Iroquois were truly the Romans and the Greeks of the New World. They ruled almost half a continent of Indians, and played an astute political, diplomatic, and strategic balance-of-power game in the conflict between their allies: the Dutch and the English, and their enemies: the French, the Hurons and the Algonquins.

It is indeed a tragic chapter in the history of our nation that these Indians became pawns in the struggle between these foreign powers for the possession of their very own lands. The battles were many, furious, and bloody. Prisoners were taken and tortured by both sides, and entire villages were pillaged and destroyed.

The Iroquois outfought their enemies for many years, however eventually they were overwhelmed by the French, and they sued for peace. One of the conditions imposed by the French on them was acceptance of the Black Robes, priests of the Jesuit Order, who would attempt to convert them to Christianity.

Among these holy men were: Father Isaac Jogues; Rene Goupil, a Jesuit brother doctor-surgeon; and John Lalande, a layman. For their zealous missionary work, for their compassion in ministering to the bodily and spiritual needs of their red brothers, they were rewarded with martyrdom. They became America's first saints. All this took place between the years of 1642 and 1646 upon the hallowed grounds of Auriesville, New York, formerly the site of the Mohawk village of Ossernenon.

Here, ten years after the death of St. Isaac Jogues, God's hand reached down from Heaven and planted a lovely Lily upon the soil fertilized by his and the blood of his companions. She is revered by her people as "the fairest flower that ever bloomed amongst redmen".

Her name is Kateri Tekakwitha, and she is known throughout the world as "Lily of the Mohawks". Tekakwitha means , "moving all things before her", and, "Putting all things in order".

Kateri was born in 1656, a daughter of a Mohawk chief, and a Christian Algonquin mother, who was taken captive by the Mohawks in a raid.

In 1660, when Kateri was four years old, an epidemic of smallpox swept through her village, and wiped out her entire family, and although she survived the ravage, it left her with impaired vision, and a pockmarked face for life.

She was adopted by her paternal uncle, a belligerent chief, who was most unfriendly to the Jesuits. He deprived Kateri of baptism and the practice of her faith so that she was not baptized until she was twenty.

It was in 1666 that the French and their Canadian Indian allies destroyed Kateri's village, which was located on the South bank of the Mohawk River. The survivors rebuilt their village on the North bank of the River at what is now Fonda, New York. It was here that the Chapel of St. Peter was built, and Kateri was baptized in it on Easter Sunday, April 30, 1676.

Resisting all offers of marriage, Kateri led a saintly and exemplary life, ministering to the needs of the sick and the aged, assisting the priests, teaching children, and suffering much abuse from her tribesmen, so that in 1677 she was forced to flee to the Indian Mission at La Prairie near Montreal, Canada, some 300 miles away.

In a letter which our Princess Kateri bore from her confessor Father De Lamberville to Father Peter Cholenec at the Mission of St. Francis, Father De Lamberville wrote: "You will soon know what a treasure we have sent you!" How right he was, indeed! So great was her sanctity during life that her fellow Indians practically worshiped the very ground she walked on. and although ailing, Kateri knew that she could find happiness only in making others happy, by doing good unselfishly. She gloried in the exercise and practice of her faith. She knew that there was so little time left of her life, and so much to do. She knew that it did not matter in God's eyes as to how many years she would fill her life with, but rather how much life she would put into her years.

It was on April 17, 1680 of the Holy Week that the soul of our lovely Lily left her body, exhausted by illness and personal sacrifice.

Many favors, cures and miracles have been attributed to her intercession, the first miracle taking place upon her deathbed, when her disfigured face changed so miraculously that it seemed to reflect the brilliance, the radiance and splendor of Heaven.

Her holy remains are enshrined in the beautiful Indian Mission Church of St. Francis Xavier at Caughnawaga, Canada, awaiting the day when she will be declared a saint of our Church. She has already attained the first step toward that goal when on January 3, 1943 Pope Pius XII declared her Venerable.

It is interesting to note a parallel between Kateri and another young woman who became a great saint in our times, but some 200 years after Kateri's death. I am referring to Saint Theresa, the little flower of Jesus, who upon her deathbed at the age of 24 promised: "I will spend my Heaven doing good upon Earth. I shall let fall from Heaven a shower of roses. My work begins after death."

Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha's last words as she left this vale of tears were: "I will love you all in Heaven. I will pray for you, and I will help you. Jesus, I love You!" She, too, was only 24 when she died.

St. Theresa is venerated as a great saint, and as a patroness of the missions. Our Princess Kateri is still waiting,.... a "Lady in Waiting" as the late Father Daniel Lord, S.J. wrote after a visit to her resting place. She is still waiting for a call to the Altar. She needs our help, our prayers, and miracles. We need Kateri. America needs Kateri as a saint of our own.

Do you realize that this great country of ours is one of the few nations on the face of the Earth that does not have a patron saint of its own? One born here from amongst us? On our American soil? Yes, we have American saints, but not one of them was born here.

Sculptor John Angel portrayed six figures on the main doors of Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York City: St. Joseph, who was Jewish; St. Isaac Jogues, a Frenchman; St. Patrick, saint of the Irish; Mother Cabrini, Italian; Mother Seton, an Anglo-Saxon; and, then there is Kateri Tekakwitha, an American Indian, but not as yet a saint.

In his sculpture John Angel tried to portray the cosmopolitan character of the Church in America; that America is a melting pot of peoples who came to her shores hungry in body and spirit, seeking freedom, and in pursuit of happiness; that the Church is an ageless mother and teacher of all men; and that God has built into nature itself the whole idea of the Body of Christ moving and working together.

Should not the Church bestow upon Kateri the halo of sainthood to implement and incarnate this thinking? Does not the United States deserve a gift from the Church on its forthcoming 200th Anniversary of Nationhood? America has never been stingy in its support of the Universal Church, always ready to come to the aid of the Holy See.

Yes, America does need a saint of its own, a saint who will depict and portray our hopes, ideals, and aspirations, and our American way of life. Kateri's heroically virtuous life fills the mold for a truly American saint.

Born of strife, Kateri strove all her life to promote love, peace and understanding. God, how much we need her, how much the world needs her intercession before God to grant us the miracle of peace. Our Lily preached and practiced love of God and Man. Today's world, and especially our youth, sorely need models of love like hers to live by.

Kateri savoured Nature as God created it. We need her pleading before our Creator to give back to us our blue skies, clean air, green forests, and clear water, and that we may once again experience the sounds of silence. That there may abound once again the sounds and sights of Nature, to see and to enjoy.

My Dear Friends, we need Kateri before the throne of God to plead for the forgiveness of the grave sins which we have committed against our black brothers, the Spanish-speaking people, the Orientals,.... but especially, the Indians: for taking away from them and despoiling their lands, herding them into reservations, and ignoring their plight so grossly that even today poverty is their way of life rather than the exception; that she may help us restore to the American Indian his righteous honor, his glory, and his proud heritage.

We should hang our heads in shame and admit that our How Ecology and Conservation concepts are taking us back to the simple truths of the "First Americans"; and that they in fact and truth, were the pioneer ecologists of this country. The Indian had a respect bordering upon awe for everything he could see, hear or touch,

for the root of Indian ecology lay in his religion. Land, water, wildlife, fruits and plants were gifts from the Great Spirit to be used with thankfulness and loving care.

His life experience also taught him the rightness of harmony-with-Nature Living, which gave him a sense of community responsibility and communal feeling.

My Dear Brethren, I could go on and on to tell you of the greatness of the Indian people, their contribution to our very existence on this Continent; how they in fact saved our pioneers from starvation and extinction, and how we have deceived ourselves into the belief that we are the superior race which brought civilization to this Continent. There wasn't much real conquering of the wilderness done by those early settlers. The white man actually moved West on ancient Indian trails. It was the Indian who taught the white man how to hunt, plant and prepare food in his new environment. Perhaps it may have been an Indian who first uttered these words of wisdom: "Sometimes you can't see the forest for the trees!"

I am certain that you have heard these exclamations: "They're movin in! They're movin in! There goes the neighborhood! Pretty soon the whole neighborhood will change!"

How well, and how true an American Indian would have been should he had paraphrased this line with: "O, man, the white people are moving into our red neighborhood! Pretty soon it will be all white!" and what the white man did to the red neighborhood, God have mercy! Oh, yes, the white man built fortunes from the natural resources of this country. Drive through such areas like Northern Michigan. There are acres and acres, miles and miles of tree stumps standing as mute and silent monuments to the millionaires who cut the virgin forests down indiscriminately.

The smog which we now choke on was not created by the Indian peace pipe, nor their smoke signals. It is created by smoke belching out of the smoke stacks of heavy industry, and from auto emission.

So the industry tycoons count their money, while many a poor Indian lingers on at the reservation, drowning his plight and desperation in cheap beer and whiskey.

Providentially, there is an awakening of consciences. Father V. J. Schaeffer recently wrote in the "Courier" of Winona, Minnesota: "A wave of guilt is manifesting itself among Americans- guilt because of what we have done to the Indians, that great but sorely tried human family which we brutally dispossessed and then thoroughly demoralized over the last few centuries. But God never forgot them, and already 300 years ago raised a humble maid among them to the heights of sanctity."

"Now three centuries later she again reappears on the scene to give courage and inspiration to her fellow redmen as they are beginning to struggle successfully for some measure of justice in a land which proclaims that all men are equal but doesn't always practice it."

It is said that the Indians are meek and backward. Meekness is not weakness. The truth lies in exactly the opposite direction. Meekness is the terrible strength found in a whipped and bloodied Christ on his way to Calvary, when he whispered: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And, Christ arose from the dead on the third day!

Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha serves as a symbol, not just as a person, but perhaps as a corporate person like Abraham, and like Jesus, Himself, to awaken in her own people, and to awaken in us an appreciation of their culture and their worth. I feel this is the hour and the time for our Lily! It is time that God in His wisdom and greatness grant her the honors of His altars, so that she may bring not only honor and glory to her people, but mercy to all of us who so shamelessly, and sometimes shamefully call ourselves Americans.

We need another miracle, they tell us, to have our Kateri declared Blessed. Is it not a miracle in itself that so many of her advocates around the World honor this poor Indian maiden who died over 300 years ago, and who storm the gates of heaven with their prayers for her sainthood?

Almighty God, we beg You, please make our Lily a saint... soon .. Just like Your Son, Jesus did on the cross when He told the repentant thief that he would be with Him in Heaven that day. Wouldn't that be a joyous day?

Can't you just see the smile on Kateri's face as she looks up to the top of the mountain, then beyond, up to the Sun??? All the way to the gates of Heaven??? as she exclaims: "My God, my God is beckoning me to His Altar! It is such a beautiful day! And, at long last, on this Clear Day, I ! can see For..... ever!"