

The charism of the first fruits

At the very time that the 50th Anniversary of the canonization of our first Martyrs was being celebrated in 1980, there took place on April 17 the 300th anniversary of the holy death of the Iroquois maiden Kateri Tekakwitha. And, one June 22, the Bishops of Canada obtained her beatification from the Sovereign Pontiff, along with that of Bishop Laval and of Marie de l'Incarnation.

It was only in 1943 that Pius XII had declared her "Venerable," but since her death, as with our Martyrs, "people had been praying to her in all parts of Canada, and God has performed several miraculous cures through her intercession" (*Les Annales de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Québec*, p. 200). The decree proclaiming the heroic character of her virtues established the connection between her sanctity and the heroism of our Holy Canadian Martyrs: "As Tertullian said 'The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.' So it is not at all surprising that, after the martyrdom of eight missionaries of the Society of Jesus, who were put to death between 1642 and 1649 for Christ whom they had preached to the Indians of these regions--Saint Isaac Jogues and Saint Jean de la Lande both met their death at the very place where Kateri had been born, the village of Ossernenon--this spotless lily should have sprung up there and developed so beautifully and spread the sweet perfume of her virtues first of all among her compatriots, and then throughout the entire Church" (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 1943 p. 152).



Kateri Tekakwitha
Sculpture by Emile Brunet, at Kahnawake.

After all Our Lord had stated: "When I shall have been raised up from the hearth, I will attract all to myself" (John XII, 32). It is the Father's plan that the co-workers of his Son in the work of Redemption should share in this divine privilege. This was true of our "founders", martyrs in fact or martyrs in desire: from the blood of their bodies or from the blood of their desires, united to the Blood of Jesus, the People of God in Canada were born. Or better still: the total dedication to evangelizing manifested by our Martyrs, their co-workers, men and women alike, their *donnés*, their spiritual and temporal benefactors, and the marvellous response of so many of their Amerindian flock from all the tribes, who lived their Christian lives with fervour and professed their faith even under torture, fashioned, in the 17th Century, the characteristic image of the Canadian Church as a People of God, among whom, in Christ, there existed a real brotherhood that embraced native converts and Christians of ancient stock. May our Saints and Blessed bring about a renewal of this vital unity in the Church of North America today !