

To the faithful of the Church of Saint John of Quebec

Dear Sons and Daughters:

Last Sunday, June 22nd, in the Basilica of St. Peter of Rome, Kateri Tekakwitha was beatified. This young Indian virgin lived her Christian life in your country and, after her death, was buried on the South Shore of the St. Lawrence River.

Today, you render homage to her in this diocesan pilgrimage. Together with brothers and sisters of her race, you thank the Lord that the "Lily of the Mohawks" has flourished in your land.

The beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha reminds us, first of all, of the missionary epic of New France. Indeed, how could she have come to the Christian faith without the admirable action in your midst of the holy martyrs of Canada, of Blessed Francois de Montmorency Laval, Marguerite Bourgeoys, Marguerite d'Youville, Marie de l'Incarnation and the other founders of the Church of Canada? In the XVIIth century, your country became a vast and active field of the Mission of the Church. The Indian people as well as the White people established in North America received the Word of God and built a young and dynamic Church.

Down to this day, the Gospel has yielded abundant fruit in your country. The Church of Canada, particularly that of Quebec, has supplied thousands of missionaries to all continents of the world. After receiving the Good News brought by Christ, your families have prepared for the universal Church men and women who accepted to give their lives to proclaim the Gospel. This generosity is at the source of the vitality of the Church in numerous dioceses throughout the world. May you remain constant in your openness to the Word of God and in your preparation of missionary vocations.

Not only does the beatification of Kateri bring to mind the missionary role of the Church in New France, it also points out the invaluable contribution made by the Native People in the life of the Church community. The liberation brought about by Jesus Christ is for all the peoples of the earth. The salvation given by God is a universal salvation. The Church, which is the visible sign of this divine action in history, must manifest in its members that salvation in Christ is accessible to men and women of every race and of every land.

The public recognition of the spiritual merits, of Kateri Tekakwitha brings into light the catholicity of the Church. This young virgin was not conceived in a vacuum. She carries in her being the experiences and values of her people. The life of this Indian woman enriches the testimony of the Church. The Mohawk people, who gave this beautiful flower to the community of believers, is still called today to contribute in the life of the Church. Dear Mohawk sons and daughters, do not hesitate to put your trust in Christ and to place yourselves and your talents at the service of the Church. Count on Jesus to affirm your human and Christian identity. Build the Church in your midst by living the Gospel of Jesus to the full.

(to be continued next week).

Address given by Pope John Paul II to the Indians during their visit in Rome.

Continuation ...of the letter sent by Pope John Paul II for the diocesan pilgrimage held in Caughnawaga, Quebec, on June 29, 1980.

PART II

As we reflect briefly on the beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha, it is essential that we recall a few aspects which characterized the life of this blessed woman. She shared in the daily chores of the women of her time. She chose to live her love for Christ in virginity. We find in her life a message that is most relevant to everyone.

The consumer society offers all kinds of commodities. It allows you to free yourselves more easily from the constraints of every day tasks, particularly those pertaining to home life. This, however, involves the risk of your being swallowed in the quick sand of material possessions. It could contribute in promoting justice among peoples by allowing for development and sharing. It does foster a drift towards the least effort, towards egotism and depersonalization. It is the scene of many struggles for equality and respect of all persons. Too often, it settles for exploitation of the poor through injustice, and exploitation of women through the exaltation of sexuality.

By responding to the grace of God, Kateri asserted her own personality in a remarkable way, which calls for our admiration and, again, offers an example that is most beneficial for our time. She manifested a spirit of solidarity with her people by accepting the tasks that were hers within Indian society. She refused, however, to let her life be determined for her by the morals of her time. She freely chose to become a Christian and to live in accordance with her Baptism. She loved Jesus profoundly, to such a degree as to consecrate her whole life to him in virginity. This did not prevent her from serving her people with joy and tenderness. She is a model for any member of a Christian family.

At the same time, she is a model of a virgin consecrated to God and, for all Christians, a model of intimate union with Christ with whom she lives in constant prayer, constant offering of her existence, and serene acceptance of the cross. In God must be sought the secret of her humility, of her strength and of her radiating joy.

Next fall, in Rome, there will be a Synod of the Bishops of the universal Church. Together, we shall study the role of the Christian family in today's world. I invite you to help your bishops to prepare this important event by offering your prayers to God for this intention and by informing your pastoral leaders of your experience of a Christian family as the Lord grants you to live it.

Pray God. Pray Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. Live according to your Baptism as she did in faithfulness to the Lord and the service of others. Thus, you shall contribute in giving your families stability and joy and you shall build the Church of Christ which is in Saint John of Que.

In this hope, I give you most affectionately my Apostolic Blessing. I give it first to your Bishop Bernard Hubert, who is the "Shepherd of your souls", to the priests collaborating with him, to the men and women religious, to the lay people of the Diocese of Saint John of Quebec, fathers and mothers of families, young people and adults. May God strengthen all of you in faith, through Christ, in the Spirit!

From the Vatican, June 24, 1980.

John Paul II, Pope

In Rome, Pope John Paul II addresses the Indians of Canada and the United States, at a Special Audience, on June 24, 1980, a few days after Kateri Tekakwitha's Beatification.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ;

It is a joy for me to meet today with all of you, representatives of the North American Indians of Canada and the United States. I greet you in the peace of Christ, and through you I wish to extend my greetings to all whom you represent, to all the Indian people of your continent. When you return home, please tell your families and friends that the Pope loves them, and that he invokes upon them joy and strength in the Holy Spirit.

You have made this long journey to Rome to participate in a special moment in the history of your people. You have come to rejoice in the beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha. It is a time to pause and to 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. Indeed, Blessed Kateri stands before us as a symbol of the best of the heritage that is yours as North American Indians.

But today is also a day of great happiness for the Church throughout the world. All of us are inspired by the example of this young woman of faith who died three centuries ago this year. We are all edified by her complete trust in the providence of God, and we are encouraged by her joyful fidelity to the Creator, to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. In a true sense the whole Church, together with you, declares in the words of Saint Paul: "Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever". (Eph. 3:20-21).

The Church has declared to the world that Kateri Tekakwitha is blessed, that she lived a life on earth of exemplary holiness and that she is now a member in heaven of the Communion of Saints who continually intercede with the merciful Father on our behalf.

Her beatification should remind us that we are all called to a life of holiness, for in Baptism God has chosen each one of us "to be holy and spotless and to live through love in his presence" (Eph 1:4). Holiness of life--union with Christ through prayer and works of charity -- is not something reserved to a select few among the members of the Church. It is the vocation of everyone.

My brothers and sisters may you be inspired and encouraged by the life of Blessed Kateri. Look to her for an example of fidelity: see in her a model of purity and love: turn to her in prayer for assistance. May God bless all the North American Indians of Canada and the United States.

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