

## RELIGION

# God bless you, Kateri, for a sane sainthood

Dear Kateri

I wasn't really sure if I should call you Ms. Tekawitha, Your Blessedness, or just plain Kateri, but, from what I've heard about you, I'm sure you are the kind of person who prefers it simple and informal. My kind of girl, Kateri.

Since, as you've probably already heard upstairs, I'm not especially first-class when it comes to praying, I thought I would just write you a little note congratulating you on your beatification. Blessed Kateri, the Lily of the Mohawks.

You realize, Kateri, that as the first American lay person ever to be beatified, you have taken one giant step forward for the little guy in this country and for anyone else who ever believed that only emaciated monks or martyrs burned at the stake or thrown to the lions had a chance of being beatified. You have restored a little sanity to our definition of sainthood. You have put a pin in the bubble of bombast and bull.

There was only one thing wrong, Kateri. Your beatification was one of the best kept secrets of the year. The Catholic press was too busy lighting candles to charismatics. The Catholic bishops were too busy playing episcopal roulette, gossiping over who would get what plum in the next opening for an archbishop. But, with only three American canonized saints in Bishop John Newman of Philadelphia, Mother Cabrini and Elizabeth Seton, it's not as if our altars are overcrowded with statues with down-home faces. Anyway, Kateri, your timing was just perfect: women in this country can use a shot in the arm. The Pope is hinting around to nuns again to start wearing habits that went out of style years ago and that are really only a superficial sign of what the nuns are all about anyway. And women with families, especially the poor, are still taking it on the chin from financial wizards like Jimmy Carter, the sexually repressive

rhetoric of many of the churches, and even the Supreme Court.

I suppose that you heard the Right to Life people were dancing in the streets last week when the Court ruled on federally subsidized abortions. I don't condone abortion but the reality of the decision was that abortion is still fine and dandy if you are rich enough to pay for it while the poor go back to the coat-hanger and the grubby fingers of some butcher in a loft. Money talks, Kateri, and poverty is a crime punishable by just about all. It's the unwritten stanza in the "Star Spangled Banner."

I have read someplace, Kateri, that you were only 23 when you died, only a kid, an illiterate young Indian girl. But, you know, you could say something now to our own kids that could be very powerful and eloquent and moving. You could tell them, for instance, that it's still cool to dream dreams without being considered weird. You could tell them about the violence and desperation that was always there in your own background and how you always escaped—out after something that was somehow within the realm of the possible for a 23-year-old illiterate Indian girl.

But there are other laywomen in the church today who have picked up where you left off. People like Helen Frey who, like yourself, does so many good and beautiful things obscurely. People like Mary Carson, who writes books and raises wonderful children. Or Helen McCarthy, who helps heal people. Or Millie Bonilla, who goes out into the streets of the South Bronx and wipes the faces of the poor. You can be very proud of them, Kateri. And they're not even Mohawk.

One last thing, Kateri. You don't have to answer this note as you are probably a little busy answering all those who are a little better than me at praying.

Dick Ryan

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*A friend of mine sent me this -*

*I made a copy for you - I'm sure you will enjoy it.*

*Dr. Procline, S. S. A.*