



JUNE 1992

*"You have
shown me
the paths of life"*

Acts 2: 28

HOME MISSION

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Cover: **Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.** Portrait by Fr. C. Chauchetière, SJ, c. 1682. Photograph by Steven J. Deme
Centre spread page 24-25: St. John the Baptist Church, Ft. Babine, B.C. Photo by Kim LaMothe

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HOME MISSION

"Eternal life is this, that you should know the only true God and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ"

John 17:7

Three communities of the Innu Nation

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A Saint for Everyone

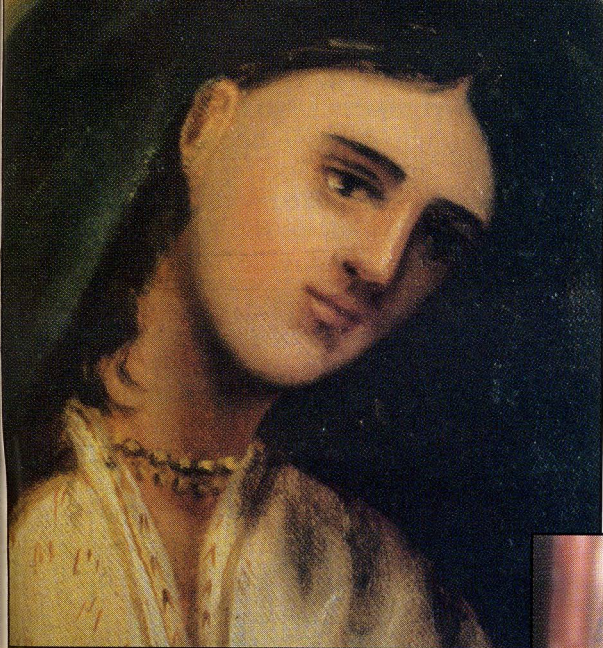
*Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha's Jesuit confessor
painted her as she appeared to him after her death
April 17, 1680*

I first encountered Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha in 1946 when I came to the mission at Kahnawake as a young Jesuit scholastic to help out part-time. Kateri had been buried in nearby Côte Ste-Catherine, but when Rome declared her venerable in 1943, her remains were moved to the church at St. Francis Xavier Mission. I remember taking some of her relics out of the vault and showing them to pilgrims. In those days, I was keen to go to China, so Kateri didn't mean much to me. It's only recently in my new posting as vice-postulator to the cause of her canonization that I have begun to learn something about her -- especially through the work of my irreplaceable predecessor, Fr. Henri Béchard, SJ, who wrote so much about her.

There is much inspiration to be found in the historical documentation of Kateri's life — especially in the *Jesuit Relations* which are volumes of letters written by the early Jesuit missionaries to their

superiors in France. Particularly, there are the letters of Fathers Peter Cholenec, James de Lamber-ville and Claude Chauchetière, all of whom knew Kateri at different times in the brief years that she was a Catholic. Together, they tell the story of Kateri's life and death, how and why she became a Christian, her remarkable pursuit of holiness, and then, after her death, the accounts of her many appearances to the living and her frequent miraculous interventions on their behalf. Through these biographers, Kateri's story from the beginning spread all over North America and Europe. After her

*(Editor's Note: After his return to Canada from 30 years as a missionary in China, Fr. Bruyère was appointed vice-postulator of the Cause for Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha's canonization in 1991. He is editor of the **Kateri** bulletin, and associate pastor at the Kateri Shrine, St. Francis Xavier Mission in Kahnawake, Québec, 14 km southeast of Montreal.)*



Fr. Jacques Bruyère: "Immediately after her death, her face, which had been badly scarred by small pox, cleared up completely and she was for the first time very beautiful."

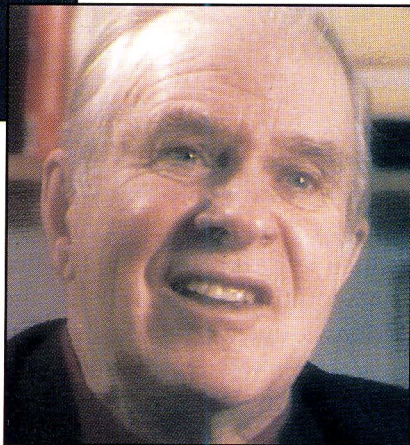
Detail of painting by her former confessor, Fr. Claude Chauchetière, S.J., c. 1682 which hangs today in the sacristy of St. Francis Xavier Church in Kahnawake.

death, the belief among native and white societies alike that she was a saint and worthy of canonization took hold almost immediately.

The first evidence of her sanctity had occurred almost immediately after her death. Her face, which had been badly scarred by the small pox she had as a child, cleared up completely and she was for the first time very beautiful.

Then, her appearances to various people began — including to her former confessor, Fr. Chauchetière. She asked him to paint her as she appeared to him and the result, a magnificent oil on canvas measuring 41" x 37", hangs today in the sacristy of St. Francis Xavier Church in Kahnawake.

June 1992



Kateri's Story

Born at Auriesville, NY 1656
 Baptized at Fonda, NY 1676
 Flight to Kahnawake, Quebec 1677
 First Communion and Vow of
 Virginity 1679.
 Died April 17, 1680
 Declared Venerable by Pope Pius
 XII
 January 3, 1943
 Beatified by Pope John Paul II
 June 22, 1980

I think this painting is what moves people most when they visit the Kateri Shrine; from it, they can begin to grasp the facts of her existence 300 years ago.

Kateri was born around what is present-day Auriesville, upper New York State, in 1656. All her family died of smallpox in 1660 (one of many European epidemics that reached the St. Lawrence–Great Lakes area by mid-century, inflicting a devastating mortality rate of over 50 per cent). Although Kateri herself survived the smallpox, she was left weak, scarred and partially blind. Her Mohawk name “Tekakwitha” means “the one who bumps into things to find her way.” Her mother’s Christian values left a profound influence that couldn’t be erased by the Mohawk uncle who adopted and raised her with his family in a village near what is today Fonda, New York. He felt strongly about her following the traditional native ways and for a while Kateri heard nothing of the Christian knowledge that she had received from her mother. Even after peace was made between the French and Iroquois in 1667 and the Jesuits began to establish missions among the Mohawks, including Fonda, Kateri didn’t dare approach the Fathers for instruction. Father De Lamberville was actually the first one to speak with her when she

was eighteen. This meeting renewed her Christian faith and courage, and she began to visit the Christian chapel regularly. She was soon baptized with the name Kateri (Mohawk for Katharine) on Easter Sunday, 1676.

Kateri was severely persecuted for her decision to become a Christian; one year later, in 1677, she escaped, making her way through the forests to the Montreal area where Christian Mohawks had formed a community. Two years later, in 1679, she received her First Communion and made her vow of virginity on the Feast of the Blessed Virgin.

Kateri really felt a great love for Jesus for the sacrifice and pain that he suffered on the cross for us. Even though she had left the pain of her religious persecution behind, she found new ways to create penance or suffering to share her love for Jesus. So much so, that the sacrifices, fasting and mortifications that made her holy also made her frail constitution even weaker, leading her to her early death on April 17, 1680. From then on, her relics and direct interventions effected so many cures and miracles that one of her Jesuit biographers, Fr. Cholenec, “ceased to write them down.”

(Editor’s note: This article was abridged from interviews with Fr. Bruyere for THE KATERI MOVEMENT, a 13-part television series currently broadcasting on VISION TV.)