

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF
BLESSED KATERI TEKAKWITHA

By Sr. Kateri Mitchell, S.S.A.

Tekakwitha was born a child of a Christian Algonquin woman and a Mohawk warrior in the Mohawk Valley near Auriesville, New York in 1656.

A smallpox epidemic swept through the Mohawk Valley and both her parents and brother died. Tekakwitha survived leaving her physically weak and fragile. She was adopted by her uncle and his wife. She was an obedient child. She performed household duties as did the other young Indian girls her age.

However, Tekakwitha always seemed to be different from the other teenagers in her tribe. She was attracted to the prayerful ways of the Blackrobes and wanted to learn more about God. She asked to receive religious instruction from the Jesuits without her foster parents knowing because she knew there would be much objection. Since she was a very determined person, she planned to pursue her growth in knowing Christ better.

At the age of 20, she was baptized in Fonda, New York, and given the Mohawk name, Kateri, which means Catherine. She made her First Holy Communion on Christmas Day.

The Jesuit Missionaries assisted her escape into Canada, to a Mohawk village called Caughnawaga near Montreal, Quebec. For a few years she had the happiness of living a life of prayer, of being able to pray in the chapel, of praying the rosary to our Lady and of attending Mass.

At the age of 23, she made a vow to never marry even though such a commitment was unknown to the other Indians. Kateri was a young woman who performed many penances for her sins and the wrong-doings of her people.

Despite the advice of her spiritual director, Kateri continued to do many acts of penance until she became so weak that she was confined to bed. It was during Holy Week that she spent her last moments and on April 17, 1680, at the age of 24, she met her God.

The people who were at her bedside marvelled at the radiance of her face when she died. They believed that Kateri Tekakwitha was truly a special person chosen by God.

In 1943, Kateri was declared Venerable by the Church.

Pope John Paul II beatified her in Rome on June 22, 1980 in the presence of hundreds of North American Indians. She is now known to us as Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.

We prayerfully await the day that our Holy Father proclaims her Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, our Lily of the Mohawks.

KATERI'S CALL TO HOLINESS

by Sr. Kateri Mitchell, SSA

As an earthen vessel, Kateri Tekakwitha holds one treasure, her Creator, her Christ. In her, one can see human dignity and sacredness present from the moment of her conception, created directly by God in His own image and likeness destined to be with Him forever.

Kateri's life was one of reverential respect for all of God's creation. This was evident in the manner she lived her life in the Mohawk village as in the words of St. Paul, "Love is patient; love is kind...Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking; it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries".

Feminine tribal values were threatened by Kateri's refusal to accept a young brave in marriage. Her one objective in life was to learn about the Creator. She spent most of her free time in prayer. Since her way of life was unknown to most of her people in the village, it was an opportunity for young Kateri to deepen and strengthen her inner convictions and to follow her interior motives despite the cost. She lived her Indian ways and prayed to God her Creator in the way her mother had taught her as a little girl. Since the people did not understand they called her undignified names, mocked her and laughed at her because she was different from the other young ladies of her tribe. This, however, did not limit nor prevent her from pursuing a profound prayer life. On the contrary, she must have received greater spiritual strength and perseverance as Matthew states so well in the beatitude: "Blest are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me".

God was so real and so alive to her and in her. In this person of Kateri, God was most powerfully at work. He was fashioning one of His greatest and precious gifts of this earth as His dwelling place. Due to her openness, receptivity and gentle love, she is God-filled and lives in the personal holiness she desired so much.

Therefore, in Blessed Kateri, our priceless earthen vessel, the words of the prophet Micah were lived to the fullest:

"To act justly,
To love tenderly,
To walk humbly with your God".

Inspired by her example, these words of Micah invite all of us today to walk a similar journey of faith, hope and love: acting justly, loving tenderly, walking humbly with our God.



BL KATERI TEKAKWITHA

Tekakwitha Conference
National Center
P.O. Box 6759
Great Falls, MT 59406-6759

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Guidelines for Native Catechesis

by Sr. Kateri Mitchell, SSA

"The Church has always looked on Catechesis as a sacred duty and an inalienable right every baptized person by reason of being baptized has the right to receive from the Church institution and education enabling him or her to enter on a truly Christian life..., the right to seek religious truth..." (Catechesi Tradendae - Catechesis in our time. Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Pope John Paul II) p. 13

Principles for Native Catechists

Catechesis demands witness of faith from Catechists and from ecclesial community - a witness joined to an authentic example of Christian life. (General Catechetical Directory) p. 27

Catechists have a duty to impart catechesis directly and also to offer their help in making the ecclesial community come alive and give witness that is authentically Christian. (General Catechetical Directory) p. 28

The gradual manner of God's self-revelation, manifested in Scripture, is a model for the catechetical efforts of the Church. (To Teach as Jesus Did - Nov. '72 National Conference of Catholic Bishops) p. 13

As Catechist and member of the Christian community on your reservation or in your area, you have made a commitment to witness, to teach and to spread the Gospel message.

It is essential that your catechizing reflects the values, traditions, customs of the tribe(s) in conjunction with Gospel values.

Take time to listen to the elders, older men and women to learn, re-discover, reinforce the values of the tribe which are to be handed down to the next generation.

Listen carefully to what the youth of the tribe(s) are saying. Be sensitive to the unvoiced cry for assistance, guidance and knowledge.

Seek out the tribe's story-tellers to learn its history, traditions, and customs.

Study and pray holy scripture to learn God's message and to deepen your own faith.

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