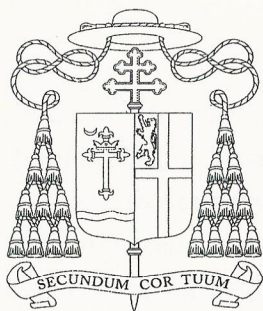


PASTORAL LETTER

ON THE MEMORIAL OF
BLESSED KATERI TEKAKWITHA
NATIVE AMERICAN HERO OF GOD



A PASTORAL LETTER

TO CHRIST'S FAITHFUL
OF
THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS:

**ON THE MEMORIAL OF
BLESSED KATERI TEKAKWITHA,
NATIVE AMERICAN HERO OF GOD**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

INTRODUCTION

In urging us to the holiness of life which is the way of the new evangelization, Pope John Paul II, of blessed memory, called us to look to the example and to seek the intercession of the blessed and saints, our brothers and sisters in the Communion of Saints, who have shown an heroic degree of holiness during their life on earth. One of his most outstanding contributions to the Church was his work to advance the study of the lives of many servants of God and blessed who lived in recent times, in order that they might be beatified and canonized.

In his Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, which is a kind of *magna charta* for the new evangelization, Pope John Paul II reflected upon the importance of our familiarity with the lives of heroes of God in responding to the universal call to holiness. He wrote:

As the [Second Vatican Ecumenical] Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be understood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few “uncommon heroes” of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual. I thank the Lord that in these years he has enabled me to beatify and canonize a large number of Christians, and among them many lay people who attained holiness in the most ordinary circumstances of life. The time has come to repropose wholeheartedly to everyone this *high standard of ordinary Christian living*: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction (Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo*

millennio ineunte, "At the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000," 6 January 2001, n. 31c).

The lives of the blessed and saints, which were ordinary as our lives are ordinary, help us to understand the extraordinary quality of every Christian life, namely, living in Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit Who dwells within the Church and within the soul of every member of the Church. Our individual lives and the life in our homes will grow in holiness by our looking to the example and invoking the intercession of those whom the Church has declared heroes of God.

BLESSED KATERI TEKAWITHA

One of the servants of God, whom Pope John Paul II beatified in the early time of his pontificate, is especially dear to us in the United States of America. On June 22, 1980, Pope John Paul II declared Kateri Tekakwitha, a native American of the Mohawk tribe, to be blessed.

Blessed Kateri was born near what is today Auriesville in New York around 1656 and died at the Sault Mission near La Prairie de Madeleine in Canada on Wednesday of Holy Week in 1680. By the time of her death at the age of 24, she had already attained the reputation of heroic sanctity. Her holiness expressed itself, above all, in a love of prayer and of penance, in devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and in purity of life. She is a wonderful inspiration to us who are called to carry out the new evangelization, that is, to live our Catholic faith with the zeal of the first disciples.

The feast day for Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha is July 14. I write some weeks before her feast day to ask that special preparations be made, in order that greater attention be given to her feast day, this year and every year, in the homes, churches and chapels

of the faithful of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis. I write also to ask you to pray for her canonization, so that she may become better known among us and throughout the world.

EARLY LIFE

Blessed Kateri was born to a Mohawk chief of the Turtle Clan, Kenhoronkwa, and a Christian Algonquin mother, Kahenta. Her parents gave her the name Ioragode which means "Little Sunshine." Kenhoronkwa and Kahenta later gave birth to a son whom they named Otsikéta which means "Sugar."

Kahenta, Kateri's mother, as a young maiden, had been taken captive by the Mohawks, one of the five nations which formed the Iroquois Confederation. The other four nations were the Oneidas, the Onondagas, the Cayugas and the Senecas. Although Kahenta had been shown a high honor in being chosen by Kenhoronkwa, a Mohawk chief, as his bride, she suffered the sadness of being denied the practice of her Catholic faith, for the Mohawks were quite hostile to the Christian faith.

Some ten years earlier, the Iroquois had martyred Saint Isaac Jogues and Saint John de Brébeuf, Jesuit missionaries to the Native Americans, and their companions. These martyrs, known popularly as the North American Martyrs, were remembered for the clear and courageous proclamation of the Catholic faith, which they made even as they were being tortured cruelly and put to death. Kahenta, having always in mind the example of the North American Martyrs, quietly taught Christian prayers to her daughter Ioragode and sang Christian hymns for her.

When Kateri was just four years old, an epidemic of smallpox struck her people. Her parents and her little brother all died

from the dread disease, leaving Kateri an orphan. Kateri was adopted by her uncle Iowerano, and the family moved from the camp which had been devastated by the smallpox epidemic to another camp which soon was flourishing as a Mohawk village. Women of the Mohawk nation, friends of her dear mother, took care of Kateri. She survived the epidemic but her eyesight remained gravely impaired and her skin bore the pockmarks of the dread disease. She was given the name, Tekakwitha, which means "She pushes with her hands," by her uncle and stepfather Iowerano who became chief in place of her deceased father. The name is very honorable for it means a woman who is prudent, hardworking and loving. Notwithstanding her impaired vision, Tekakwitha was a diligent worker and was respected for the carefulness and joy with which she carried out even the most menial of her tasks.

BAPTISM

The early influence of her deceased mother and the virtues which she developed under the influence of her Native American relatives received a confirmation from Jesuit missionaries who arrived at her village in 1670. Although Iowerano was skeptical of the missionaries, he permitted them to teach the people and work among them. Of course, he would not permit that any member of his family become Christian. Many of the Mohawk people were baptized and then moved to the Saint Francis Xavier de Sault Mission (La Prairie la Madeleine) on the Saint Lawrence River, which had become a true center for Native American converts to live their faith with serenity.

Eventually, Father Jacques de Lamberville, also a Jesuit, arrived at the village. He had extraordinary human and spiritual gifts. It was to him that Tekakwitha first openly spoke of the Catholic

faith of her mother and of what she had been gleaned from observing the Jesuit missionaries celebrate the Sacred Liturgy and from listening to their teaching. She asked to receive the Sacrament of Baptism.

Father de Lamberville proceeded with great prudence and caution, for he understood the persecution of Tekakwitha, which would follow, for she was the daughter of a deceased chief and the adopted daughter of the present chief. Father de Lamberville had her attend catechism classes and discovered that she had a solid knowledge of the faith and had developed remarkable habits of prayer and contemplation. Father de Lamberville was astonished to find a person of such spiritual depth in the middle of the wilderness, for Kateri manifested a mature spiritual life like that of a contemplative nun or monk.

On Easter Sunday, 1676, Tekakwitha was baptized by Father de Lamberville and received the Christian name Kateri or Catherine. Her patron saint was Saint Catherine of Siena whom she imitated by her love of prayer and meditation.

Kateri became so devoted to prayer and acts of penance that her family and friends in the village turned upon her. She was harassed by many and even threatened with death by a Mohawk warrior. Father de Lamberville saw the need to transport Kateri to the Sault Mission, where she could practice her faith with tranquility. With the help of an Oneida chief by the name of Garonhiague, Father de Lamberville was able to have Kateri taken to the Sault. Although her stepfather pursued her, she was able to reach the Mission of Saint Francis Xavier de Sault in safety.

It was the practice of the missionaries to delay First Holy Communion for some months, in order to be certain that the newly-baptized was firm in faith and practice. Kateri received her First Holy Communion on the Christmas following her baptism. It was for her the happiest day of her life, the day which gave the direction for the rest of her days and assured her of her final destiny with God in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Kateri flourished in the community of Native American Catholics at the Sault Mission. The missionaries deeply admired the faithful of the Mission. The Jesuit missionaries had not required the Native Americans to take on the way of life of the Europeans but led them to receive the Catholic faith and practice with integrity, while preserving the natural goodness found in their own culture. In this way, the Native Americans were able to purify their culture of any pagan element without denying the goodness of many elements of their culture. The heroic virtues of Blessed Kateri are an excellent example of how the Catholic faith and practice were received with integrity into the life of an exemplary Native American. The purity of faith and life of Blessed Kateri earned her the title, Lily of the Mohawks.

HERO OF GOD

In the company of other devout Catholics, especially her dear friend and second mother, Anastasia Tegonhatsiongo, the profound spiritual life of Blessed Kateri developed and inspired her brothers and sisters of the Sault Mission. Her life at the Sault Mission, brief as it was to be, brought to fullness her communion with Christ through prayer and the sacramental life, and through the daily fulfillment of her duties and tasks with Christlike love.

As Kateri was growing up among her relatives, she was encouraged to consider marriage. Even though she bore certain physical deformities caused by smallpox, she was the daughter of a chief and recognized for her outstanding virtue. She was prized as a future bride. Kateri, however, remained always reserved on the subject and, in her deep love of Christ, resolved to give her life completely to Him. She desired to be a bride of Christ.

She had visited Montreal, observed the life of the consecrated religious women there and was deeply attracted to their consecrated life. When she asked one of the priests about entering the convent, he discouraged very much the idea, thinking that it would be too difficult for a Native American to live in the convent. Kateri, not to be deterred in the expression of her total dedication to Christ, asked to make a vow of perpetual virginity. The priest assisted her and on March 25, 1679, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, Kateri Tekakwitha vowed publicly in the Church to remain a virgin for ever for the sake of espousing Christ. The profession of her vow and the living of the consecrated life brought Kateri the greatest joy, a joy which, in a little over a year, would reach its fullness in handing over her earthly life completely to God in Christ.

LOVER OF THE CROSS AND THE HOLY EUCHARIST

Although Kateri always carried out faithfully her daily duties in the Mission, she led a disciplined life of prayer and took every occasion to receive further instruction in the faith. Daily Mass, Eucharistic visits and Vespers, and private prayer, especially the Holy Rosary, marked the pattern of her daily living. During the hunt, she would spend time in the woods before a cross which she carved into the bark of a tree or

made with the sticks she found there. In the life of Blessed Kateri, we see the central place of devotion, inspired by communion with Christ in the Holy Eucharist and preparing for communion with Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

In the final years of his pontificate, our late and most beloved Pope John Paul II proposed what he called a pastoral plan for the Church at the close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and the dawn of the Third Christian Millennium. The pastoral plan is life in Christ, lived as if for the first time, lived with the enthusiasm of the first disciples and the first missionaries on our continent. It is life in Christ, lived with the enthusiasm of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.

The pastoral plan is set forth in Pope John Paul's Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, "At the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000," published on January 6, 2001. It is completed and crowned with his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, "On the Most Holy Rosary," published on October 16, 2002 (the beginning of his twenty-fifth year of service as Successor of Saint Peter), and his Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, "On the Eucharist and Its Relationship to the Church," published on April 17, Holy Thursday, in 2003. Pope John Paul II wrote the three documents in strictest relationship to one another.

In short, the pastoral plan which is life in Christ (*Novo millennio ineunte*), relying upon the example and constant intercession of the Mother of God, who leads us to Christ and helps us to come to know Him and love Him (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*), reaches its fullness in the Eucharistic Sacrifice (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*). The Holy Eucharist is the source and the highest expression of our life in Christ. To the degree that our faith is

true, we are in constant wonder and gratitude before the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, rightly called the Mystery of Faith.

Studying the life of Blessed Kateri, we come to understand the pastoral plan of Pope John Paul II. More importantly, we are inspired to put his pastoral plan into action, through the study of the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation (the mystery of the Cross), through prayer and participation in the sacramental life of the Church, and through the careful and loving fulfillment of the duties of our daily life. Pondering the life of Blessed Kateri, we discover the extraordinary nature of our ordinary Christian living and are filled with new enthusiasm and energy to transform our personal life and our world with the love of Christ.

DEATH AND ETERNAL LIFE

During the year after making her vow of perpetual virginity, Kateri grew weaker and weaker. Eventually, she was confined to her quarters, in which we was lovingly attended by her brothers and sisters in the faith, and by the priests. She was prepared for death through the reception of Holy Viaticum. Her last words were a profession of love of our Lord: "Jesus, I love you." Kateri Tekakwitha died on April 17, Wednesday of Holy Week, in 1680.

At the moment of her death, our Lord granted miraculous signs of her birth, through death, into eternal life. Her eyes and her body were restored to radiant beauty. Truly, her body shown with the radiance of Christ, her Bridegroom. Immediately, there were various expressions of devotion to Kateri who was called "the saint."

A special favor was granted to her second mother, Anastasia, who was absent on the hunt when Kateri died. A week after her death, on Wednesday of Easter Week, Kateri, holding a radiant cross, appeared to the sleepless Anastasia and declared: "Mother, behold this cross. How beautiful it is! It was the source of all my happiness during my life, and I counsel you to make it yours, too" (Henri Béchard, S.J., *The Original Caughnawaga Indians*, Montreal: International Publishers, 1976, p. 73).

By her life and by her prayers for us, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha bids us, with the Virgin Mary, to look upon Christ on the Cross and to find in Him all our happiness. She bids us to be one with Christ on Calvary through our participation in the Holy Eucharist, to be one with Christ – Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity – in the outpouring of His life in love of God and neighbor.

DEVOTION TO BLESSED KATERI

Kateri Tekakwitha was the first Native American to be beatified. Since her beatification, Juan Diego, also a Native American and the messenger of Our Lady of Guadalupe, has been beatified and canonized. Recognizing the heroic sanctity of Blessed Kateri, I urge you to pray daily for her canonization. Confide to Blessed Kateri your special intentions.

In particular, I ask that the annual observance of her feast be marked by a triduum of prayers on July 11, 12 and 13, and by participation in Holy Mass, if possible, on her feast day, July 14. I am sending to every priest in the Archdiocese two booklets published by the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions in Washington, D.C.: *Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha: Lily of the Mohawks* and *Triduum in honor of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha to seek her intercession and pray for her canonization*. I ask the priests to assist all of the faithful in the Archdiocese to come to know better

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, to ask her intercession and to pray for her canonization. You may request directly copies of both booklets from my office or from the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions at 2021 H Street, N.W., in Washington, D.C. 20006. The telephone number of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions is: 202-331-8542.

There is so much more which I wish to write about the heroic holiness of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, but time and space prevent me. I commend to you three books about the life of Blessed Kateri: Francis X. Weiser, S.J., *Kateri Tekakwitha*, Montreal: Kateri Center, 1971; Henri Béchard, S.J., *The Original Caughnawaga Indians*, Montreal: International Publishers, 1976; and Margaret Bunson, *Kateri Tekakwitha, Mystic of the Wilderness*, Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1992.

CONCLUSION

Devotion to Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha is especially promoted in our country through the formation of local Kateri Circles. The members of the Kateri Circles throughout the nation foster a deeper knowledge of the heroic sanctity of Blessed Kateri, offer prayers through her intercession, and pray and work for her canonization. The Archdiocese of Saint Louis does not yet have a Kateri Circle. If you would like to help form a Kateri Circle in our Archdiocese, please be in communication with me.

Once again, I commend the life of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha to you. At the same time, I confide the work of the new evangelization in the Archdiocese of Saint Louis to her intercession. May Blessed Kateri assist us by her example and prayers to love the Cross of Christ and to receive the grace of salvation from the Cross through the Holy Eucharist.

Given at Saint Louis, on the twenty-first day of June, the Memorial of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, Religious, in the year of the Lord 2005.

+ Raymond L. Burke

(Most Rev.) Raymond L. Burke

Archbishop of St. Louis



Rev. Jerome D. Billing

Reverend Jerome D. Billing

Chancellor

PRAYER

For the Canonization of
Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha

O God, who, among the many marvels of Your Grace in the New World, did cause to blossom on the banks of the Mohawk and of the St. Lawrence, the pure and tender Lily, Kateri Tekakwitha, grant, we beseech You, the favor we beg through her intercession; that this Young Lover of Jesus and of His Cross may soon be counted among her Saints by Holy Mother Church, and that our hearts may be enkindled with a stronger desire to imitate her innocence and faith. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Imprimatur

Most Rev. Howard J. Hubbard, DD

Bishop of Albany