

**A RETREAT
WITH SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA**

By

Dorothy L. Armstrong

DEDICATION

This little booklet is dedicated to

**Father Patrick Francis Rice
Pastor of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha Church
Sparta, New Jersey**

**Whose love for Saint Kateri
Has brought many of us to**

**Auriesville and Fonda, New York,
Kahnawa':ke, near Montreal, Canada**

**And to her Canonization in
Rome
On October 21, 2012**

CONTENTS

Life of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

The Pain of loss

The Work of Everyday

New Life in Christ

Persecution for the Faith

Sharing the Faith With Others

Graces of Suffering

Call To Holiness

LIFE OF SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha was born in what is now New York State in 1656. Her Mother, Kahenta, an Algonquin Indian, was a Christian but not her Father who was a Mohawk War Chief. An epidemic of smallpox killed her parents and her brother when she was four years old. Little Tekakwitha was brought up by an uncle and two devoted aunts. Although she survived the terrible sickness, the smallpox left her face scarred with ugly marks, and diminished her sight.

On Easter Sunday 1676 at the age of twenty, Tekakwitha was baptized by Father de Lamberville of the Jesuit Fathers who had established a mission there in 1670. She was given the name Kateri in honor of St. Catherine of Siena. She received her First Holy Communion the following Christmas. The Jesuit Fathers were very impressed with Kateri's piety and prayerful devotion. Father de Lamberville was amazed at her knowledge of the Christian Faith even before her instructions.

When a persecution was leveled against Kateri because of her conversion to Catholicism, she was persuaded to go with some relatives to Canada where a Catholic mission had been established, Saint Francis Xavier de Sault, near Montreal. Kateri brought with her a letter to the Fathers from Father de Lamberville with this prophetic testimony: "I send you a treasure, guard it well."

On March 25, 1679 Kateri took the vow of Celibacy to live as a bride of Christ. Everything she did she offered to Jesus. Living in the Catholic environment of the mission allowed her to attend daily Mass, morning and evening prayer, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and the celebrations of feast days. She carried out her normal duties and participated in the usual traditions of her tribe. As others observed Kateri's devout piety and devotion, some of them wondered if she would soon leave them for Heaven.

Within a year of her consecration, Kateri's health began to fade. The priests brought her Holy Communion and people were at her bedside, knowing that she would soon depart from them. She died on Wednesday of Holy Week, April 17, 1680. The small community of Native Americans and the Fathers were astonished to see her face take on a luminous hue, and become as fresh and smooth as a baby's, with all the scars gone!

Pope Pius XII declared her Venerable in 1942, and Pope John Paul II declared her Blessed on June 22, 1980. Kateri Tekakwitha was canonized a Saint on October 21, 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI. She was named as a patroness of World Youth Day in 2002

Day One – The Pain of Loss

At the age of four, little Tekakwitha must have had memories of her Mother and Father and her Brother. Fortunately, the tribal lifestyle of the Mohawks assured the child of a loving family presence. She was almost blind but grew up and worked hard like everyone else.

As we begin our retreat reflections on the life and graces of Saint Kateri, it is good to look into our own lives and consider the pain of loss that Kateri certainly suffered. There are all kinds of losses in life: death of a spouse or a child; loss of everything through tornados, floods, wild fires, earthquakes; termination of employment or a title.

A person may experience a vacuum in life due to the rupture of a relationship: a spouse, a sibling, even a parent. Upon honest reflection, it may cross my mind that I had a lot to do with the break in communication. Sometimes people hold grudges for years, waiting for an apology. This is a loss outside God's will, needing his healing and the grace of forgiveness.

When I think about past losses, what is it about them that I remember? How did I react to them? It may have been very difficult to accept circumstances in my life, and looking for some good to come out of them stretches Faith. Yet, for some, when God closes one door, he opens another, or raises a beautiful window that they never knew was there! Even in the midst of devastating disasters, God's love and care are present in the charity of others.

There is so much loss in the world. As I sit in a comfortable chair in a safe and peaceful place, I cannot even begin to process the fact of millions of refugees who have lost everything, including their country. Mentally, I do not want to go there, but if I sit with Tekakwitha, the child orphan who became a saint, I *must* go there. She teaches me to love largely, to forgive truly, to open my heart in prayer, to be present to the afflicted, to console others, to show compassion when I am able to do so.

This retreat time can be the beginning of a new consciousness in me to bear all loss with a strong heart, taking small steps into an unknown future where Saint Kateri's Faith provides light in the darkness.

PRAYER

Jesus, please grant that I will never lose you, never go so far from you that I will feel like an orphan, loveless and unlovable. Give me the grace of Saint Kateri who heard your story and recognized a love so big, so true, so self-giving that she opened her entire life to receive it.

Please help me to recognize any losses that may have been of my own foolish doing. When difficulties surround me because “life happens,” then I ask the prayers of Saint Kateri so that I will be able to see every event in my life as an opportunity to grow, and accept the giftedness of it from your hand.

Suggested Reading: Job, Chapter 38

Day Two – The Work of Everyday

Life in the Mohawk village was filled with hard work, attention to the seasons, days of celebration and a close familial bond. The older women taught Tekakwitha domestic skills which included making and decorating clothing. Despite her weak eyesight, Tekakwitha excelled in this close work and made skirts and blouses enhanced with beads, quills, feathers and shells that were prized by the women. Because she was the daughter of a Mohawk War Chief, she was held in esteem and her aunts cared for her with much love.

We of the twenty-first century do not have to hunt for food nor till the soil nor collect wood to keep the fires going in our kitchens. We hop in the car, go to the supermarket and prepare jiffy meals. Many people confess that they have lived in a “community” for years but do not know any of their neighbors. What a different world ours is when we study the life of Saint Kateri!

We may have deluded ourselves that we are in control of our own survival; hence, we do not need others. Everyday work could take on the appearance of a planned scheme of life in which I determine outcomes to serve me and my family. Period. Retreat time offers me the opportunity to stand back and look intently at the big picture.

Why do I do what I do? Is my identity wrapped up and sealed in my work? Do mundane chores have any relationship to virtue and growth in holiness? In the frenetic stress of modern life, do I take time to smell the roses? Making meals, doing housework, shopping and administering a household while keeping a full-time job can be daunting. Saint Kateri worked very hard also, but she offered everything to Jesus. Retreat is a good time to reflect on my work ethic.

It may seem like an unreachable luxury to take any time in the morning for prayer; it need not be a long prayer, but if it comes from the heart it is a good prayer. It could develop into a habit of a daily morning offering to God. Years ago a priest said that any time we have to wait as in bumper to bumper traffic or in shops, or in gas lines it can be an opportunity to make a spiritual Communion, inviting Jesus to be closer to us.

Because of the “separation” between church and state, we may think that our Faith is for church but not to be “mixed in” with our daily lives. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council make it clear that laymen should also “*know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city*” (*Gaudium et Spes* #43). And St. John of the Cross tells us that to bend over to pick up a pin for the love of God carries graces to us.

PRAYER

Dear Saint Kateri, Lily of the Mohawks,

You did not build hospitals

But you ministered and comforted the sick.

You did not establish schools

But you taught children about Jesus.

You were not a CEO of a corporation

But you took your place in the work of the Tribe.

You did not create a new fashion empire

But you made beautiful clothes for others.

You did not study Theology

But you knew so much about God!

Dear Saint Kateri, please teach us your secret of holiness: the doing of all things well, and the offering of all things to God. Please teach us how to grow in holiness as we go about our daily work, our family duties, the very ordinary joys and sorrows of life. Be close to us, dear sister in Christ.

Suggested Reading: Col 3:12-17

Day Three – New Life in Christ

Even before Tekakwitha's instructions in the Catholic Faith, this young Indian girl was more than ready for Baptism. She seemed to know so much about God and his Son Jesus. After Baptism, she glowed. Her prayer became more profound, and she carried within her a quiet joy. She was heard to say: "I am no longer my own; I have given myself unreservedly to Jesus Christ."

Tekakwitha was baptized on Easter Sunday of 1676 and was known henceforth as Kateri, named after the great Italian mystic Catherine of Siena. Since so many Catholics are baptized as infants, it is rare for people to know the date of their "life in Christ." Maybe it takes a lifetime for us to understand even a little of the great mystery and gift of Baptism: *"You were strangers to the covenant and its promise; you were without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ.... This means that you are strangers and aliens no longer. No, you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God"* (Eph2:12,13,19).

Kateri grasped the theology of Redemption in Christ, and knew that it was a personal gift from God to her. Jesus became her life. When she lived in the village of Kahnawake in Canada, she took the vow of chastity and found this as a deeper way to belong to her Beloved Jesus.

Our instructions in the Catholic Faith may have been hit or miss, or maybe serious and on-going, as in a Catholic education and furthered by a family grounded in the Faith with Sunday Mass a tradition of long-standing. Who celebrates their baptism anniversary? Do I know the date? What does it mean for *me*, this lesson from Saint Paul to the Ephesians?

A retreat is a time to reflect on God's call to me as an individual, inviting me to a deep and trusting relationship with him. He has indeed called me by name. (See Is 43:1) and made me a part of his family. To be "in God" touches every aspect of life if I allow it. It should color my life direction, my choices, large and small, my aspirations, the very roots of my identity. How often do I reflect on the tremendous reality that my life is "in Christ"?

Kateri can teach us so much!

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you came into our world to serve us, to save us, to feed us and make us one with you and the Father and the Holy Spirit. Your death on the cross brought new life to the human family because you overcame death in your resurrection. Your grace and your peace lift me from my sinful habits and lead me gently in the path of holiness.

Jesus, Kateri became holy in four years! I have been baptized for many, many moons! I try to listen to your Word at liturgy, but I must admit that it has not penetrated my bones yet. Please enlarge my understanding of what it means that I am called to a life "in Christ", that you are the root and foundation of my life. Jesus, Good Shepherd, lead me, carry me, teach me. Amen

Suggested Reading: 1Cor 15: 12-28

Day Four – Persecution for the Faith

As Tekakwitha learned more about Christianity, and attended Mass and various services held by the Fathers, some of the other Mohawks felt that she was abandoning her native heritage. She had already developed a habit of prayerfulness and sought opportunities to be alone with God.

After her baptism, Father de Lamberville actually became worried about her safety. When she refused to marry, one of the young men threatened her. It was after her formal profession of Faith that people began an open persecution of Kateri. When one of the Fathers asked her how she could bear up under this new pressure, she answered that what she was going through could not be compared with what Jesus suffered for her in his passion. It was because of this turn of events that led Father de Lamberville to persuade Kateri to leave the New York mission and join some relatives and Catholics near Montreal.

When we live a life “in Christ” our values will likely rub people the wrong way. To live the Gospel message often propels us into a contra-cultural stance. Jesus says that if we are not with him, we are against him. (Lk 11:23) In other words, we cannot have it both ways. Either I follow Jesus or I go my own way in worldliness wherever it leads. It takes a certain kind of spiritual courage to disagree with the multitudes. Poor dear Saint Peter must have felt very courageous when he was with Jesus, insisting that he would follow him anywhere. But when push came to shove, Peter buckled. Can any of us put ourselves higher than Peter?

Many people consider themselves righteous, and they are. But in times of persecution it must take special graces for us to be faithful. It is the test that makes the gold pure. Many Christians today are suffering very real persecution because they are followers of Jesus. If we have never been put to this test, let us thank God for it; but let us never forget to pray for our brothers and sisters in many places in the world whose lives are in jeopardy.

I may not have the threat of death hanging over me because I am a Catholic, but I may hear remarks about the Church, or be the object of mockery from colleagues or family. I may work in a hostile environment and find it difficult to practice lessons from the Gospel by being kind or even civil!

If I take my religion seriously and open my heart to an intimate relationship with Jesus, I need a purposeful prayer life, a daily effort to be loving, and a practical exercise of humility, courage and inner strength. Saint Kateri is a good model for us.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you had many altercations with the religious leaders of your day, entangled arguments and verbal traps. You knew the consequence of your unyielding Truth. We have a full Church calendar of determined and faithful martyrs who witnessed to you to the very end of their lives, facing untold suffering.

We have read stories about your sweet Kateri, a humble young woman with little or no education. We follow her life and marvel at your grace working so mightily within her. During this retreat we ask you, Jesus, to make us very strong in our Faith. Let us always be "with you," never against. And please comfort our martyrs of today and give them great graces of steadfast hearts. Help us to be faithful no matter what happens.

Suggested Reading: Rom 8: 28-39

Day Five – Sharing the Faith with Others

When Saint Kateri was baptized, she was so filled with joy that the story of Jesus filled her entire life. She used to make small crosses to give to the children so they would understand what Jesus did for all of us, dying a cruel death on the cross. She is quoted as asking this question: “Who will teach me what is most agreeable to God, so that I may do it? The Jesuit Fathers were very aware of the seriousness of this young woman when it came to doing God’s will and learning more and more about it.

It may very well be that many of my acquaintances harbor, even unknowingly, this same question, looking for answers that will speak to their human desires. Who will teach me? Beginning with Pope Paul VI and the popes following, the Church today has been summoned, challenged, and mandated to answer this question for modern man. *“Above all the Church knows that her message is in harmony with the most secret desires of the human when she champions the dignity of the human vocation, restoring hope to those who have already despaired of anything higher than their present lot. Far from diminishing man, her message brings to his development light, life and freedom. Apart from this message nothing will avail to fill up the heart of man.”* (Gaudium et Spes #21)

Jesus sent his followers to go out to all the world (Mk 16:15) so that all people would hear the Good News of salvation and hope and meaning. In his Encyclical, *Redemptoris Misseo*, Blessed Pope John Paul II invites all of the Christian faithful, both as individuals and as part of a community, to bear authentic witness to Christ; he goes on to say that this can happen only if we ourselves are converted anew every day. (RM #46)

The word evangelization seems to scare some Catholics. Are we so insecure in our Faith that we cannot even speak of it to others? Are we uncomfortable when asked why we go to church, or what is the Rosary about? Kateri had no such inhibitions: she loved Jesus and spoke freely about him. He was the Center of her life.

Retreat is a good time to reflect on my relationship to Jesus, and my willingness to be converted every day. Only by being filled with God’s grace and love will I be able to share the story of Jesus with others.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, perfect Son of the Father! I carry within me your saving grace. I am timid in talking about you. I look at the life of our dear Saint Kateri and wish that my heart was burning with love as hers was.

Please remember her ardent devotion and give me a tiny piece of it so that I will truly be a witness as our popes have taught. May it be, Lord, that friends and strangers alike will be able to find the answer to some of their questions through my life of Faith, spoken or silent. Amen.

Suggested Reading: 1Pt 3:15-17

Day Six – Graces of Suffering

Saint Kateri was so mindful of Jesus and his gift of himself to us, especially in his passion, that she wanted to share in his sufferings. She looked for ways to bear pain to offer to God in union with Jesus, like standing alone in the forest barefoot in the snow. She had a particular grace of penance and endured hardship and suffering with great joy. Her last days on earth were marked with pain and ill health, but she bore all this with graciousness. She herself had often ministered to the sick with gentleness and love.

Can you name on one hand five people you know who have never had any suffering in their lives? Indeed, Jesus knew all about it when he encouraged us: *“Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps. Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it”* (Lk 9: 23, 24). (Bold added) Jesus does not advocate pain and suffering for its own sake. He cured many, many kinds of illnesses during his lifetime and had pity on the crowds who were hungry (cf Mk 8). When he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he spoke with his Father: *“You have the power to do all things. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you would have it, not as I”* (Mk 14:36).

Saint Paul of the Cross, in his letters of spiritual direction, exhorts his penitents to offer to God every inconvenience, suffering, disappointments, etc. to God in union with the passion of Jesus. And he then tells them not to go looking for penances to do because there are enough of them that will find us in our daily lives! Jesus talks about losing our lives for his sake; in other words, those sufferings that come to us because of our life of Faith, trying to follow in his steps and live according to the Gospel.

Life in seventeenth century North America was not easy; normal everyday work was demanding and the climate was harsh (as it still is.) Kateri’s penances were different from ours, but we have abundant opportunities today to be united with Jesus in his passion. It may take a great restraint not to complain about weather; we could make washday a hymn of thanksgiving that we do not have to go down to the river but only throw clothes in a machine in the house. If we do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, as St. Paul exhorts us, we will have penance a plenty to offer for our sins and the sins of others. Again, our guide is a young Indian woman who knew just how to do it.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Suffering Servant, ever-faithful Son of the Father, I come to you today to ask for the grace of a new willingness to follow in your footsteps and take up the cross you have prepared for me. Please teach me to give you **everything** that makes up my life: my work, my joys, my pet peeves, my pain, my disappointments, my small triumphs, my sins, my reluctance to forgive, my attempts to stretch beyond where I am and have been.

Jesus, you wooed the heart of Saint Kateri and she responded with all her soul. Call me as you called her and the Prophets and the Saints before her and after her. The Church holds up to me a multitude of Martyrs who lost their lives for your sake. Take my life and make me more like you no matter what the cost. Thank you. Jesus. Amen

Suggested Reading: 1Cor 2

Day Seven – Call to Holiness

Some people were speaking about Blessed Kateri's upcoming canonization, and a man asked: "But what did she DO?" Someone answered: "She lived the Gospel message." If this statement falls flat, a retreat is a good thing! Holiness is being for God, and it is the being that propels the doing, not the reverse. Jesus reminds us that "*where your treasure is, there your heart is*" (Mat 6:21). In studying the life of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha it is easy to observe that Jesus was her Treasure, and her heart was totally open to receive him. She seemed to echo the words of St. Paul: "*I have been crucified with Christ, and the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me. I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (Gal 2: 19).

The Fathers of Vatican Council II have this to tell us about the call to holiness for the whole Church, news to many! "*The followers of Christ are called by God, not according to their accomplishments, but according to his own purpose and grace* (Lumen Gentium #40). So what I DO is not the point of my Christian life, except that everything that I do should reflect my life in Christ. At the end of #41 in Lumen Gentium, the Document encourages us in this way: "*All of Christ's faithful, therefore, whatever be the conditions, duties, and circumstances of their lives, will grow in holiness day by day through these very situations, if they accept all of them with faith from the hand of their heavenly Father, and if they cooperate with the divine will by showing every man through their earthly activities the love with which God has loved the world.*"

So, perhaps it is a good thing to ask ourselves where we keep our hearts. Jesus says it is tucked in where my treasure is. So, what is my treasure, where do I keep it? A new car, a bigger house, the latest iPhone, my precious reputation, my time, my accomplishments, my job, my talents, etc. Take a few minutes and see if you can really pin point your treasure and your heart.

We sometimes use the expression of putting our heart into a project; what a good way to think of prayer! The Holy Spirit nudges us in our thoughts, but our hearts are where it matters. Holiness comes from the heart, and it is in all the ordinary offerings we make to God in our everyday life. Saint Kateri is an extraordinary model for the routine and prosaic, a young person who became a Saint in a short time because she lived the Gospel message of love.

PRAYER

Jesus, we rejoice with you that your chosen vessel, Kateri Tekakwitha, heard your story and imprinted it upon her soul and made you her very life. Alleluia!

We thank you for all the graces you showered upon her and to which she responded with so much enthusiasm and devotion. Alleluia!

We thank you for the work of the French Jesuits who labored in her vineyard and reaped the glories of Martyrs and Saints. Alleluia!

We rejoice with you that your sweet and holy Mother Mary was ever present in the lives of these early Catholics who have left us such a rich heritage. Alleluia!

We are optimistic in knowing that your grace is offered to all of us, giving us the wherewithal to be holy. Alleluia!

We beg you, dear Jesus, to pour out upon us new graces of the Holy Spirit so that we may follow in your footsteps to the very Heart of the Father to the place reserved for us in Heaven. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! Amen!

Suggested Reading – My personal Book of Life, page by page, day by day. Again I say, Amen!

KATERI
PO Box 210
Chaplain NY 12919

March 23, 2014

Dear Friends of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha,

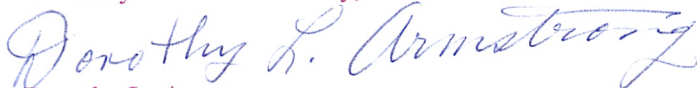
A friend just sent me a copy of your wonderful little magazine, KATERI. This sweet new Saint is patroness of our parish here in Sparta, NJ. Many of us were able to go to her canonization in Rome. Then in April of 2013 we made a bus trip to Kahnawake to visit St. Kateri's resting place. Before that, we had a bus trip to her Shrines in New York. What graces we have received from her!

While in Rome, our Pastor, Father Patrick Rice, asked me to write a Retreat with Saint Kateri. I finished it as a gift for his birthday in June, 2013. Since that time I have tried to find a publisher for it. I picture it as a booklet like your magazine, with pictures of St. Kateri and her Shrines. I believe that all the retreat houses in the United States would benefit having it, as well as various organizations, especially young people. Kateri's holy life reaches out to all of us.

I did not know if I should send this to you in NY or to the publisher of your magazine in Canada. Is there any chance that you would have an interest in this humble work of mine, Retreat with Saint Kateri Tekakwitha? I would love to give Father Pat a finished copy like a booklet, in color.

I enclose here a copy of another little work I did when I was working in Rome many years ago. May God be praised and glorified if these things are pleasing to Him and helpful for His People. May He continue to bless your work.

Sincerely in Jesus and Mary,


Dorothy L. Armstrong

20 B Trapasso Drive
Sparta NJ 07871
973-7297419
angeldla@embarqmail.com