

Fr Paolo Molinari (Postulator for the Cause of Kateri) interviewed by Fr Thomas Rosica (Salt+Light Catholic Media, Canada) – Octobre 2012 – Rome.

TR: You are a Postulator for the Causes of Saints. In fact, you've been involved in this process since 1957. Of Jesuit priests but, also of many lay people. Tell me a bit about the process of making a saint, or of bringing a saint to completion.

PM: I am glad you asked this question because I know that there are many people who have an interest in this topic and yet very often, false ideas are circulated regarding this topic. This kind of activity done by the Church is conducted with seriousness. It demands a lot of attentiveness and solid scientific work, especially, due to the amelioration of the process that were introduced by Pope Pius XII. It was him who stated that there was a need to introduce reform. Reform in making use of historical documents to help us see into the lives of these people. These people whom the people admire. Because, in truth there are many documents that can shed light on the richness of these people's way of living, according to the Gospel.

TR: Father, how many cases have you brought to completion?

PM: Well, certainly forty-five, or forty-six. Two are coming in October: Kateri Tekakwitha and Jesuit Jacques Berthieu of Madagascar, whose case I began to work on way back, as well as the first that I brought to beatification.

TR: So, I think we could say that you have many friends in heaven.

PM: Certainly. I do consider myself a poor humble servant of these people who really do deserve much love and attention. I felt it was the best use of my best qualities and abilities, which God has given me, and that have been improved as time goes on, studying, and working hard.

TR: Father, we met back in 2001 as we were preparing in Canada for the world youth day. It was Blessed Pope John Paul II who gave us Blessed Kateri as one of our patrons. We both talked about her then. We spoke about her virtues, her role in the life of young people. She is a model of behaviour. What is so special about Kateri Tekakwitha?

PM: It's rather difficult to put it into just one sentence. Because, she is of an Indian tribe, therefore the whole question of what white people, or rather Americans, Canadians, or Europeans do they know of the mentality, and the traditions of Indian tribes of North America? This made it difficult, and yet again thank God for this task. Historians in the 1940's -when I was not involved- referred to the archives kept by the missionaries and Jesuits of the time, who'd come from France. Many of them were killed and martyred by some of the Indians. Every year, they wrote very long reports to the Superior General (in France).

Reports about precisely how these Indians lived, what their customs were, some facts about their mentality, research about the native lifestyle etc. All of this made it possible for them to officially canonize many deserving saints, always under the direction of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints originally set up by Pope Pius XI, who in 1930, as a historian, realized the need to make use of these documents in order to better understand these people who lived around the world as well as in different times in

history. They produced an excellent “short Positio”, which today Postulators produce. Yet, back in those days it was the work of several historians.

TR: You mentioned Americans, Canadians, North Americans. Who does Kateri belong to? She began her life in what we now know to be New York state...

PM: I would love to be able to say that she’s been sponsored by the Conferences of both Canada and the United States, but it didn’t turn out that way. Why? Because according to the Code of Canon Law of 1917, which was changed in 1983, it’s up to the local Bishop to decide after a person dies when to start the process.

TR: Normally the place where the saint dies, the cause begins from that place. So, we could say that the process should have been started in the diocese of Saint-Jean-Longueuil (Quebec, Canada).

PM: Correct, but it did not.

TR: Where did it start?

PM: From the Diocese of Albany, in the state of New York. I wasn’t alive when the whole thing began. However, it’s also important to note that the current borders did not exist at the time that Kateri lived. Because of that, an exception was made. Also, the region Kateri hails from, near Fonda (USA), has an exceptional following of people who take interest in Kateri, both native and white Americans. Of course, an interest in her was then and now is still very much alive in parts of Canada where there are different tribes, just as many parts of the united states share different native tribes. Essentially, because she was so loved, and because interest in her was from across North America, it makes it difficult to give you an exact answer with respect to her belonging to a specific country.

TR: When a person is proclaimed blessed, beatified, one could say that the calling, the devotion, the veneration of that person is more localized, but, when a person is raised as a saint and offered to the universal Church does that person then belong to the whole Church?

PM: Yes, she belongs to the whole Church. Which, has at times been a problem. For me to say to some people or to some families that he or she is no longer yours. That this person’s name is now *Son or daughter of God*, is difficult. Nevertheless, a saint belongs to the Church as such, so that the veneration is spread across all the Dioceses throughout the world.

TR: We know what is required for the process of beatification: one miracle, and for canonization, also one miracle. Because of the reform for the process of canonization, for the Cause of Kateri, and the beatification... can you say something about that miracle?

PM: At that time, not just one miracle was needed for the beatification. But in any case, I dealt with Pope John Paul II who had great interest in seeing people canonized from places which had not previously had anyone recognized by the Church as saints. I told him there are quite a few. One from Brazil, one from Canada, Marie-de-L’Incarnation, and of course, Kateri Tekakwitha. There are reports going back two, three centuries regarding cures that could not be understood then, or of persons who could not be cured

according to the medicines of that time, but who could be cured now with the help of modern medicine. So, we concluded that we would try and see if we could make some case summaries and put together some detailed accounts in writing. Then, we provided these reports to some specialists because they can tell us based on what was said in the accounts, what we can conclude by way of symptoms, or an illness leading to death. You also have at the same time, prayers to these people and then suddenly an almost impossible and unexplainable cure occurs.

TR: Let's talk about the case of Jake Finkbonner in Ferndale, Washington (USA). The young boy who was healed through the intercession of Kateri. It was Jake that brought about Kateri's canonization, finally. What do you know of the story of Jake?

PM: Well thank God, I know the history very well. I say this because the credit for the gathering of the documentation must go to Archbishop Alexander Joseph Brunett of Seattle.

TR: Can you tell us about the critical role that he played in the process of Kateri's canonization?

PM: Great question, because I feel that the merit, precisely because of all the inquiries, as well as the gathering of the evidence to prove the validity of an extraordinary cure is due to his actions, initiative, and spirit. It was criticized by some people without competence because officially, a Postulator did not request it. However, it was on the contrary, and I will repeat it again, that thanks to his initiative and his competence, that the process commenced. He approached not only the family of this boy, but also the medical team of the Children's Hospital of Seattle, who were non-Catholics. So, with delicacy and courtesy, he attempted to see whether they were willing to give a detailed account of what happened, and their actions in this situation in which this boy was flown to the hospital. Then, of course with the help of Jake's mother, documents were acquired from the hospital.

He gathered all the clinical evidence, the day-to-day reports, and even the clinical reports from the surgical theater. A truly exceptional amount of detailed, scientific documentation. Then, they managed to get four or five of Jake's doctors to collaborate. The craniological facial surgeon, as well as others. Each one of them offered a very detail account of their own personal experience. Each one had his or her own special field of practice. These doctors were involved during three critical weeks, and I might add, conducted themselves with the utmost competence, and awareness. It's no small matter what they did, one mistake and the boy's appearance as well his ability to talk could have been forever stunted. They did the best they could. Thankfully, with the guidance of Fr Tim Sauer, the Finkbonner's parish priest, the family prayed to Kateri Tekakwitha. Jake's schoolmates prayed, then his two parishes joined in prayer, and finally by way of Sister Kateri Mitchell who not only prayed at Jake's side but also spread the word by e-mail that Jake needed prayer and assistance, reaching out to all the various tribes.

TR: Father, a young woman dies 332 years ago. Her life does not correspond very well with the lives of young people today. She believed in chastity, purity, serious mortification, long hours in prayer, extraordinary poverty, and simplicity. She knew the pain of abandonment and loss, of being ostracized because of her choice of faith. What does she say to young people today, and to native people?

PM: I feel that we must be extremely careful pointing out the differences in the environment in which Kateri lived, their mentality of her tribe at that period. They were also against some of the moral beauties that the Gospel puts into light, which is precisely what is going on today in a different way. The mentality of the world today is certainly against chastity, it certainly isn't in favor of Christian principles. Therefore, there is not only a similarity, but a substantial similarity. The circumstances under which the young people of today live are not too different from those youths of the past.

So, I think it is possible to show that fundamentally, what the contemporaries of Kateri's tribe were doing corresponds to the behaviour of today's youth through pornographic films and all the rest. Whereas, back then it was a mentality. Again, today it's pretty much the same. Kateri went against the way of the world as Saint John would call it, and it's our jobs as priests and followers of the Christian faith to fight back against the mentality of the world today. Secularism, laicism, obviously these are areas in which Kateri herself provides for us a wonderful example to the point and extent that the priests, and missionaries realized that if she was going to continue living with her tribe, it would have been practically impossible for her to correspond to the Word of God, who was acting in her heart, and to whom she so faithfully followed.

So, she relocated from her tribe in the United States to La Prairie (Canada), and to the Mission of Saint Francis-Xavier where there was a very fervent community of Christians. This way she could enjoy an atmosphere more conducive to the life of a good Christian. This move was executed on the suggestion of Father Jacques de Lamberville. Of course, even her uncle who was the chief of the tribe, upon realizing that Kateri had left the tribe, sent out some warriors prepared to kill her and the ones that helped her.

TR: One last question for you Father, you're going to meet Kateri one day I am sure. And she is going to meet you. What are you going to ask her when you meet her?

PM: Well, I will not ask for anything. I will thank her for her goodness and for her fidelity to the Voice of God. I would ask her to please pray to God, that He may reach the heart of the youth today. They need to follow the Gospel just as she did... despite the opposition and the mentality of the world as we know it today.

TR: Thank you, Father Molinari.

PM: My pleasure.

(Transcription of an interview found on the DVD: In Her Footsteps – text abridged)