

**SOME VALUABLE POINTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE CAUSE OF SAINT
CATHERINE TEKAKWITHA
(1656 – 1680)**

Part I

Catherine was born in 1656 in that part of the American continent which is today the State of New York.

Her parents were native Indians: the father was an Iroquois, a pagan, the mother an Algonquin, was a devout Christian.

During the few years that she lived close to her little baby, she often spoke to her of Jesus Christ and narrated some Gospel episodes: by so doing she planted in her heart precious seeds which the grace of God made mature and flourish as she grew in spite of the fact that the environment in which she lived was typical of the pagan tribes. This is the beautiful role of a Christian mother towards her little children who absorb even unconsciously what later on will become an essential element of their upbringing.

The name that at birth was given to the little baby was “yoragode” = “splendor of the sun”.

When she was four years old, Catherine lost her parents and her only brother to an epidemic of smallpox. She too contracted the disease and, although she survived, her face was left severely pockmarked.

However, as she grew she carried all along in her mind and heart what the mother had told her about Jesus, while the grace of God was acting in her and made grow the desire to become a Christian.

Finding a home in the family of her uncle, a Chief of the tribe of Agniers, more commonly known as the Mohawks, she was brought up in that tribe.

While living among the Mohawks she had the unexpected fortune of meeting some Jesuit Fathers who dwelt as guests with the Chief of the tribe that is her uncle who entrusted her the responsibility of taking care of them.

This was an exceptional opportunity for her to be in contact with the “black robes”, to watch them, to experience their goodness and to see them in prayer. On the other hand it was a unique opportunity for the Jesuit Fathers to become aware of the way in which God had formed the soul of this native Indian. Later on she received instruction in the Faith and was baptized in 1676 by Father Jacques de Lamberville, one of the devoted Jesuit missionaries committed to the evangelization of the Indians.

After becoming a Christian, Catherine (in Iroquois “Kateri”) soon became a model of youthful piety; however she continued to lead the ordinary life of the young girls of the village, taking part of the normal works assigned to them: collecting wood for the fire of the long hut, taking care of the cooking, making garments and ornaments. It was by doing this that she showed a particular ability in the use of her hands and at the same time a delicate concern for the people who were in need.

Part II

Everything we know about Kateri is derived from the reports (“*Relationes*”) which the Jesuit missionaries had to send to the Superior General about the state of affairs in the mission. In these reports they write about the environment in which they live, about the customs and the traditions of the people with whom they deal and about their reply to the efforts of their evangelization.

In these reports the missionaries offer occasionally detailed information about some particular individuals and among those they mention especially Kateri Tekakwitha who, more than anybody else, distinguishes herself through her fervor and devotion to the Lord.

Obviously the Cause of Beatification of Kateri had to rely entirely on these reports which continue to mention her even after her death (1680) by referring to her fame of sanctity and the general veneration attributed to her by successive generations of people.

In ordinary circumstances this would have occasioned the beginning of her Cause of Beatification by means of an Ecclesiastical Inquiry which would have collected the depositions of a number of witnesses who had known Kateri personally and would thus be in a position to offer exhaustive detailed data about her life and the way she practiced the Christian virtues.

However, in the entire area of the North American continent the circumstances were anything but normal: suffices it to mention that only about two hundred years after the death of Kateri the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy was constituted in the United States (in 1850) and that only after that year there existed the possibility to set up a Tribunal to collect the depositions of her contemporaries who by that time of course were no longer available.

It is, however, highly significant that the Archbishop of Baltimore already in 1858 requested Pope Pius IX to grant permission for the beginning of the Cause of Kateri.

Naturally as long as the norms of Canon Law requested the depositions of contemporaries of Kateri who could speak of her virtues and her fame of sanctity it was not possible to begin her Cause.

The situation was drastically changed in 1930 by a personal decision of Pope Pius XI who was a professional historian and as such considered it not to be acceptable that highly meritorious Causes could not be dealt with for the only reason that on account of the particular adverse situations of the countries in which they had lived, it had not been possible to collect in time the depositions of contemporary witnesses.

In order to remedy this situation Pius XI created in the Roman Congregation which dealt with the Causes of Beatification and Canonization a “*Historical Section*” which would have the task to collect and evaluate all historical documents regarding the so called “*Ancient Causes*”, and if these resulted to be exhaustive, authentic and conclusive in favour of the candidate in question, to prepare a synthetic exposition and print it in a proper “*Positio*” that would have the same value as the finding of a process in which contemporary witnesses would have made their sworn oral depositions.

In 1940 such a “*Historical Positio*” for the Cause of Beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha was available.

In due time, the usual discussions took place in the Congregation which on account of their positive conclusions led to the approbation of the heroicity of the virtues of Kateri Tekakwitha by His Holiness Pope Pius XII.

Part III

After becoming a Christian, Catherine soon became a model of youthful piety: her life and love were centered on the person of Jesus Christ.

Under the impulse of the Holy Spirit she felt the need of returning the love that Jesus has shown to us by dedicating her entire self to Him and not to a human being in marriage.

By wanting to be “one with Jesus Christ” she was distancing herself from the traditional attitudes and customs of the tribe, and thus she became the target of harassment and persecution at home on account of her faith and her determination to live in virginity.

On the advice of the missionaries, who thought she should move to friendlier surroundings, she came to live among the fervent community of Christian Indians of the settlement known as the Mission of St. Francis Xavier, in the Prairie de la Madeleine, near present-day Montréal. Here she made great progress in a short time along the road of holiness.

The first winter that Kateri spent in this mission was that of 1676-1677 and at the beginning of the year the hunters were leaving the village: it was customary that the women and the children were accompanying them for the whole period of the hunts until the snow melted.

Kateri went with them when the time spent in the cold of the nature was very hard for the health, and the Christian recently converted could easily return to live according to their own ancestral traditions.

In such an extremely difficult situation, Kateri managed to live as a fervent Christian: being deprived of the possibility of participating at the Eucharist, she raised a cross in the woods by means of two branches: there she went to spend time in prayer, uniting herself to the Christians who had remained in the village and were attending the celebration of the Eucharist in the chapel of the mission.

Her virtue was known by everybody, and in the light of such a reality her spiritual director, Fr. Cholenec, by making an exception to the rule concerning the catechumens, allowed her to receive the Holy Eucharist on the first Christmas that she spent at Sault.

This was exceptional because the native Indians who had been baptized had to wait for a period of several years before being admitted to this Sacrament.

Kateri was a real exception, constantly responding to the demands of God and to the promptings of the Spirit; this is how she followed with docility the inspiration by which God was attracting her to be totally His and thus rejecting the gift of self to another human being in marriage.

When Father Cholenec, who knew her deeply, gave her the advice to reflect for three days over the possibility of entering into married life, after just a few minutes she told him that

with regard to an interior act of God there was no need to spend further time to reflect: “Jesus Christ is my only Spouse”.

She was well aware of the consequences of such a decision; in fact she knew the mentality and customs of her own people. The determination not to marry would have led her to be in misery and abandonment because she knew that a young woman depended entirely on her husband for the dwelling and the support in life.

Father Cholenec was so deeply convinced of the Christian maturity of Kateri, of her priorities and of her love for Jesus Christ that on the 25 March 1679 he allowed her to offer herself forever to the Lord, and this after having given her the Eucharist for Communion.

This way, poor and unlettered, but rich in the strength and beauty that God gives to the pure of heart, she becomes an accessible model for young people of today who are often subjected in intense and varied pressures that urge unchastity as the norm.

Part IV

The Decree on the heroicity of the virtues of Kateri Tekakwitha signified a primordial progress towards the Beatification, but before this could take place another requirement had to be satisfied, namely that God had worked two miracles through her intercession.

The demonstration that this had really happened incurred unfortunately the same difficulties which I have already mentioned when dealing with the assessment of the extraordinary virtues of Kateri. In fact, just as in this matter, also in the demonstration that God had worked miracles through the intercession of Kateri, the Ecclesiastical legislation prescribed then as now that a Canonical Inquiry must be celebrated in which a number of witnesses contemporary to the alleged miracles must be interrogated under oath what they know personally about the extraordinary intervention of God in the cases in question as well as that these divine actions were to be ascribed to the invocation and intercession of Kateri.

Here it was to be noted that in the documents collected by the Historical Section of the Congregation, mention is made of numerous cases of totally unexpected, sudden, complete and permanent cures of serious illnesses.

The medical doctors of the times following the death of Kateri in 1680 and subsequent times have according to the historical documents given a very precise and accurate description of the symptoms of the illnesses in question and declared at the same time that the cures of the same defied their medical knowledge since they had no means whatsoever to bring them about (be it noted that many medicaments have been scientifically found only in the 20th century, but they were not known two or three centuries ago).

From the same historical documents it also results that in these humanly speaking impossible cures the faithful had invoked the intercession of Kateri Tekakwitha and attributed the cures to the same.

All this should have been attested by contemporary witnesses in a formal Ecclesiastical Process, but, as already has been stated, during two centuries no such Processes could be celebrated.

Confronted with this situation I requested and obtained a private Audience with His Holiness Pope John Paul II to whom I explained the state of affairs and proposed that the most outstanding cures about which the historical documents gave evidence should be described in a proper “*Positio*” in which should be incorporated what internationally recognized specialists in the field of medicine would have to say with regard to the cures in question. In particular they should state whether the symptoms of the diseases described by their early predecessors would enable them to reach certain conclusions about the diagnosis of the illnesses, the prognosis and the impossibility to cure them with the means which at the respective times were available.

On the basis of the judgments of highly qualified specialists of our present times we could eventually reach the certain conclusion that the cures under consideration were due to miraculous interventions of God.

If in addition the ancient documents would demonstrate beyond a doubt that in the cases under consideration the faithful had invoked the intercession of Kateri Tekakwitha, it would equally become clear that the said miraculous interventions of God were due to her intercession.

This would then mean that all the requirements of Canon Law would be fulfilled and that the way to her Beatification would be open.

To my great joy and consolation His Holiness John Paul II decided that we could proceed along the outlined procedure; and in fact it was through the careful preparation of a “*Positio*” which contained all the essential statements mentioned above, on June 22, 1980, the Holy Father could effect the Beatification of Kateri.

On that very same day His Holiness celebrated the Beatification of four other Venerable Servants of God, made possible by the application of the same method which I had suggested for the Cause of Kateri.

Two of the new Blessed were Canadians, namely Bishop Francis de Montmorency-Laval (+1708), and Mary of the Incarnation (+1672).

The other two were Joseph de Anchieta, S.J. (+1597), a missionary in Brazil and Peter of St. Joseph de Betancur (+1667), an outstanding layman who had lived and died in Guatemala.

Part V

The Beatification of Kateri gave me the welcome opportunity to meet Mr. Andrew Delisle, the Grand Chief of the Confederation of the Indians of North America, as well as some other Chiefs and to have some friendly conversations with them which helped me to understand more the typical traits of their mentality and repercussions of the latter on their behavior, their life of faith and their religious attitudes.

Obviously the Chiefs were greatly appreciative of the Beatification and convinced that this important event would increase the devotion to Kateri and have a positive influence on the religious and spiritual life of their people.

However, there was something in what the Chiefs gave me to understand which struck me in a very particular manner.

I refer to the fact that in accordance with the typical mentality of the Native Americans: the Beatification of Kateri is primarily seen as an event which regards their entire community and this in a twofold sense:

a) in other nations the Blessed and Saints are very frequently seen as individuals who have responded in an eminent manner to the promptings of the grace of God and then are – so to say – put on a column and thus are separated from the rest of the people as they are admired and venerated.

There is no doubt that Kateri responded to the grace of God in an outstanding manner and it is also certain that the native Americans acknowledge this; but they underline heavily that Kateri acted in this way as a member of the community to which she belonged, in which she observed the best traditions of her people and in doing so was sanctified by the grace of God.

This is the first element in which the Beatification of Kateri is seen by the Native Americans, that is primarily under the aspect of its communitarian importance.

But this is not the only aspect to be considered in this context.

b) indeed, the very fact that the Supreme Authority of the Church declared in front of the entire world that a native American has led an exemplary Christian life which merits to be followed by all, constitutes an official and highly significant recognition of the community of the native Americans, their culture and their traditions, in which and through which, just as in other nations, it is possible for God to raise people to perfect sanctity.

This is what the said Chiefs also told me in their conversations years later when by order of the Pope I had to fulfill some tasks in Canada which had nothing to do with the Cause of Kateri. I took this opportunity to visit her tomb in Kahnawa:ke and to spend some time in prayer there. On this occasion I met the Vice-Postulator of the Cause of Kateri, Fr. Jacques Bruyère, S.J., and Fr. Louis Cyr, S.J., who both lived in the old Mission of St. Francis Xavier. During our conversations they gave me further ample information about the mentality of the Native Americans and in doing so fully confirmed what the Grand Chief Andrew Delisle and other Chiefs had told me at the time of the Beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha in June 1980.

In my considered opinion these attitudes of the Native Americans merit to be more commonly known and respected, and this is the reason why I have mentioned them here at some length.

Part VI

On the evening of the day in which the Beatification of Kateri had taken place in St. Peter's (June 22, 1980), it occurred to me that it might give some satisfaction to the considerable number of pilgrims who had come from the Canadian settlements and were staying in the hotel Midas on the via Aurelia together with the Grand Chief Andrew Delisle, if I went there to show them the photographs which Mr. Mari and his helpers had taken during the Ceremony on behalf of the *Osservatore Romano*.

I thus got in touch with Father Léon Lajoie, who stayed with them in charge of their spiritual animation, in order to announce my visit and to ask him to see that all the Chiefs would be in

attendance. In fact when I showed to them and to the pilgrims the photographs they were delighted; many of them asked me where they could get copies of them.

I was back at home around midnight, full of joy that I had been able to give them such a pleasure.

Early next morning (June 23) Father Léon Lajoie telephoned me and thanked me once more in the name of the pilgrims, but he also told me that after I had left all the Chiefs had had a long meeting in the course of which they manifested the desire that the native Americans present in Rome for the Beatification of Kateri should possibly be granted a special audience with His Holiness the Pope on the very next day (June 24) since they were scheduled to get back home on June 25.

Naturally I was fully aware of the fact that it would be quite difficult to obtain such an audience and even more so at such a short notice; and indeed when I submitted this request to the private Secretary of the Pope, Msgr. Stanislaw Dziwisz, his answer was not only totally negative, but he also expressed his bewilderment that I had dared to present such a petition.

This certainly was not encouraging, but in my desire to favor the request of the Indian Chiefs, I was fully determined to try yet another approach in order to obtain such a Papal Audience. This is how I went about it.

I was aware of the fact that Cardinal Krol, Archbishop of Philadelphia, and President of the “Bureau for Catholic Indian Missions” was in town. As we knew one another since years and our relationship had always been most friendly, I decided to get in touch with him and inquire whether he could do something to help us.

The Cardinal understood at once what this audience would have meant for the Native Americans and then he added: “it so happens that today I will have lunch with the Holy Father. Rest assured that I will not fail to use this opportunity to petition him also in my own name so that this audience be granted”.

The Cardinal kept his promise and obtained what we had wanted. He called me at 3 p.m. and told me that His Holiness had immediately and most willingly agreed to receive the Native Americans in a special audience which he would grant them in the Sala Clementina at 10.30 a.m. the following day (June 24). He insisted however that only the native Pilgrims should be allowed to get through the Bronze Door to proceed to the Sala Clementina; in fact they had no tickets of entrance and the Chiefs should provide that nobody else should participate in the audience.

In my subsequent conversation with the Grand Chief Andrew Delisle he assured me that he would personally take care of the strict observance of the order of the Pope and he also accepted my suggestion that he himself should briefly address his greetings to the Holy Father and express the pilgrims’ gratitude for the Beatification of Kateri and his willingness to grant the special audience.

For reason of space I cannot produce here the complete text of the carefully prepared Allocution which the Holy Father pronounced during the audience. But here are at least some highly significant words of the latter.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is a joy for me to meet today with all of you, representatives of the North American Indians of Canada and the United States. I greet you in the peace of Christ, and through you I wish to extend my greetings to all whom you represent, to all the Indian people of your continent. When you return home, please tell your families and friends that the Pope loves them, and that he invokes upon them joy and strength in the Holy Spirit.

You have made this long journey to Rome to participate in a special moment in the history of your people. You have come to rejoice in the beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha. It is a time to pause and to give thanks to God for the unique culture and rich human tradition which you have inherited, and for the greatest gift anyone can receive, the gift of faith. Indeed Blessed Kateri stands before us as a symbol of the best heritage that is yours as North American Indians.

The Pope then spoke about the pastoral importance which the Beatification has not only for the Native Americans, but also for the Church universal. He concluded his speech with the following words:

My brothers and sisters, may you be inspired and encouraged by the life of Blessed Kateri. Look to her for an example of fidelity; see in her a model of purity and love; turn to her in prayer for assistance. May God bless you as he blessed her. May God bless all the North American Indians of Canada and the United States.

At the end of the audience a simple glance at the pilgrims showed me how deeply they were impressed and moved by what they had just experienced.

Naturally I expressed my gratitude to the Holy Father and I fervently thanked Our good Lord that he had made it possible to give this joy and encouragement to the members of this great and admirable ancient nation.

Part VII

Sometime after the Beatification of Kateri preparations were made for the celebration of the World Youth Day which was scheduled to take place in Toronto (Canada). The Holy Father, who had beatified Kateri and had great admiration of and affection for her, gave me to understand that he would gladly take this opportunity to present Kateri Tekakwitha, “authentic Indian and authentic Christian”, as a shining example to the youth of the entire world and indeed he did this in one of his messages.

Together with Monsignor Boccardo, who was in charge of the preparation of the journeys of the Pope and in consultation with His Excellency Monsignor Magher, who was responsible for the organization of the World Youth Day, we thought about a very special papal gesture which certainly would have had a considerable resonance in the hearts of the youth and especially so among the Indians.

We knew that His Holiness in Toronto would stay in the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph and that in leaving this city a helicopter would bring him to the local airport. According to the original plan the Pope would have liked to go to Kahnawa:ke to the tomb of Blessed Kateri, but unfortunately his very tight time schedule made this impossible.

We considered, however, that there could be an alternative solution, namely that instead of his personal visit to Kahnawa:ke he would delegate some young Indian people to go there in his name and as his personal representatives. Obviously this delegation should be given in a very public manner and reported by the various television stations and other media which certainly would be present when the Pope would leave the said motherhouse and go on board of the helicopter. In order to do this, the Pope would have to cross a certain distance on foot. It was during this short walk that he could meet the people who in his name would visit the tomb of Kateri and be officially delegated to do so. We chose some young Native Americans for this task and prepared a short message which His Holiness would deliver to them in order that they would place it on the tomb of Kateri.

For this message we chose the following words which are sculpted on the marble stone placed on her grave: “Kajataron Kateri Tekakwitha” which mean “I send you my greetings noble and precious Kateri”; and then we added “Help the youth of today to love Christ and their neighbors as you have done”.

Together with this message he would have given them his white skullcap asking them to deposit it on the grave of Kateri. All this had been arranged and agreed upon and care had been taken to obtain also the necessary approbation of the Canadians security authorities who were in charge of the security of the Pope.

But then something unforeseen and unforeseeable happened that ruined everything. In fact, while the young Native Americans were on the spot which had been assigned to them and were waiting there for the Pope, someone who had no authority whatsoever to intervene suddenly obliged these young people to enter into the building of the motherhouse. When shortly afterward His Holiness came out of the building and went towards the helicopter, his “delegates” were nowhere in sight and by consequence the carefully prepared plan which he himself had approved and wanted, came to nothing on account of the inconsiderate and irresponsible intervention of the said person.

I refrain deliberately from mentioning the feelings of those who had worked hard and lovingly for the realization of this project. But I must add that His Holiness himself gave me to understand that he sincerely regretted and even was quite disappointed that his intention to show also in this manner his admiration of Kateri and his love for the Native Americans had in this way been frustrated. In my considered opinion these good intentions of the Vicar of Christ on earth merit to be known and appreciated.

Part VIII

The Beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha gave a great satisfaction to the faithful but increased at the same their desire that the Catholic Church should complete her Cause by officially declaring her a Saint. The people knew that the canonization of Kateri could only take place if we were able to present to the Holy See the scientific demonstration that God had worked a miracle through her intercession. By consequence they invoked the help of Kateri in their various necessities and especially in the occasion of illnesses which in their opinion could only be cured by a miracle. In the course of the years I received many reports of such presumed miracles which it was my duty to study carefully in order to ascertain whether they possessed indeed those qualities which would at least offer a serious probability that the Holy See would see fit to approve them as real miracles. Many of these cases were brought to my attention and further investigated with the help of my excellent Vice-

Postulator in the United States, the Very Reverend Monsignor Paul Lenz to whom I wish to express my gratitude also on this occasion. To my sincere regret I was obliged to abandon many of these cases presented to me, but finally I received a report regarding a cure which I at once considered to be so exceptional as to warrant the hope that the latter would eventually open the way to the canonization of Kateri as indeed did happen.

The case in question regarded Jacob Finkbonner, a young boy (born February 19, 2000) belonging to the Indian tribe of the Lummi nation, who shortly before his 6th birthday, and precisely on February 11, 2006, during a play of basketball collided with a pole which caused the laceration of his upper lip. At first this fact did not cause any preoccupation, but already the next day the boy appeared to be seriously ill and on February 13, 2006, his conditions were so serious that his parents took him to the local hospital where they were advised that Jacob should immediately be transferred to the Childrens' Hospital of Seattle, one of the most famous hospitals of this kind in the United States and perhaps in the world. This transfer was considered to be so urgent that the boy was immediately by helicopter brought to the said hospital where his illness was at once diagnosed to be a necrotizing fasciitis, commonly called by the name of "flesh-eating disease". I first became aware of this terrible illness of Jacob Finkbonner and his sudden and totally unexpected cure by means of the copy of a letter which the Reverend Father Tim Sauer, the pastor of the parish to which the Finkbonners belonged, had written to the Archbishop of Seattle, His Excellency Alex Brunett. Naturally I wrote immediately to the latter asking him what he thought about this case and whether he would eventually be prepared to instruct a canonical inquiry about it in his archdiocese. The Archbishop replied immediately with a most friendly letter in which he told me that with the help of the mother of Jacob he had already obtained from the Childrens' Hospital of Seattle the entire medical documentation regarding the nature of the illness of Jacob Finkbonner, the progress of the same, the therapy he had received and the surprising cure that had taken place on March 4, 2006. He added that he had personally approached the four highly qualified and very experienced professors who had taken care of Jacob and that all four had sent him a written statement about what they had done and that they were not able to state that there existed the possibility to explain the totally unexpected and unforeseeable cure of Jacob on medical grounds. In order to underline the importance of these statements His Excellency mentioned the fact that none of these specialists was a Catholic. He concluded that he was most willing to order a canonical inquiry of this case as soon as I would petition him to do so. I naturally did so without delay and between September 2007 and May 2008 this canonical inquiry effectively took place. When the Acts of the latter were sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, they judged that there were some shortcomings in the observation of the required juridical formalities and ordered that they be remedied in a supplementary inquiry. I answered these charges in a detailed documentation, without ever receiving an answer. So it was necessary to celebrate the supplementary inquiry which was held from August 28, 2008, till June 26, 2009. However, before this second inquiry, the Most Reverend Archbishop of Seattle invited me to fly to Washington, D.C., and meet there with His Excellency Bishop Joseph J. Tyson, at that time Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle, who had been the President of the Tribunal of the first inquiry and in the same capacity, would act in the second one. The Archbishop wanted this meeting in order that any future objections on the part of the Congregation would be avoided. When in due time we met in the capital of the United States, we discussed these issues in a most friendly and cordial atmosphere.

In all 33 witnesses were heard during these inquiries and among them the four already mentioned professors to whose care Jacob Finkbonner had been entrusted during his stay at the Childrens' Hospital. They repeated orally what they had already previously declared in writing. Their testimonies are, of course, of the greatest importance as far as the origin, the development of the illness of Jacob and his unexpected cure are concerned. Other witnesses, as for example the close relatives of Jacob reported what they had observed when they visited and stayed with him at the hospital. They and many others gave witness to the fact that they had frequently and insistently invoked the intercession of Kateri in order to obtain the cure of the young boy. It goes without saying that the entire medical documentation obtained by Archbishop Brunett was also included in the Acts of the inquiries. On 12 February 2010 the Congregation issued the Decree of the juridical validity of both inquiries.

It was now my task to prepare the "*Positio super miro*", a volume which contains 430 pages in print. For reasons of space but also in order to spare the sensitivity of the readers I deliberately refrain from mentioning here the gruesome details concerning the ways in which the doctors treated Jacob by constantly cutting away those tissues of his head, neck and breast which had been eaten away by the necrotizing virus which tormented him. But I feel bound to give at least the essential facts regarding the invocation of Kateri made by an exceptional high number of faithful who implored her to obtain from God the cure of the mortally ill child. Here are these essential facts:

As soon as he heard of the grave illness of Jacob, the Reverend Tim Sauer asked the faithful to invoke the help of Kateri. He did this during the religious services he conducted not only in the main church of his parish but also in some other churches and parishes in which he led the faithful in prayers in which the help of Blessed Kateri was invoked in order to obtain the cure of Jacob. Father Sauer also took the first opportunity to visit the Childrens' Hospital of Seattle where he gave spiritual assistance to the members of the Finkbonner family and with success obtained from them to pray to the Lord through the intercession of Kateri on behalf of their little relative.

But Father Sauer was by no means the only one to engage in this activity. Mr. Henry Cagey, the President of the Lummi nation to which Jacob belongs, appealed to their well-known sense of solidarity and requested with success that they invoke Kateri's protection on behalf of the young member of their tribe. Similar requests were made by him also with regard to other groups of Native Americans.

Then there was the initiative of the President of the Assumption Catholic School which Jacob had frequented and who obtained that all the children of the school and also the staff daily beseeched Kateri in this intention.

Finally there was the appeal of Sister Kateri Mitchell, the organizer of the *Blessed Kateri Annual Conference* which are very numerous in the United States but which exist also in other countries. They were requested by a flow of emails to pray for the cure of Jacob through the mediation of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. The army of those who prayed in this sense was thus increased by several thousand persons of all walks of life.

Speaking about Sister Kateri Mitchell another fact ought to be mentioned which turned out to be of paramount importance for the furthering of the Cause of canonization of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. Years ago Reverend Father Sauer had heard that after her Beatification a precious relic of her had been donated by the Vice-Postulator of the time to a

religious who was living in Montana. He remembered this now and spoke about it. Immediately a search of the whereabouts of this Sister was begun. When Sister Kateri Mitchell was approached to help in this search, she declared that she herself was the religious to whom the Canadian Vice-Postulator Father Henri Béchard S.J. years ago had given her this relic which was still in her possession and taken with her on all her numerous travels. She added that on March 4, 2006, she had to attend a meeting at Seattle and that she would on this occasion bring this relic to the Childrens' Hospital when she would pay a visit to Jacob Finkbonner. She did what she had promised to do and in the early afternoon of March 4, 2006, she and the mother of Jacob jointly placed this relic on the body of the still mortally ill youngster. Then a most extraordinary thing happened. On this very same day, March 4, 2006, the laboratory of the said hospital which constantly analyzed the blood of Jacob, informed the doctors who treated him that suddenly and totally unexpectedly "the Proteine Reactive C" (CRP) had returned normal. As the doctors in question explained, this meant that the deadly virus had ceased its activity and that Jacob had been cured.

Both the medical doctor who was a member of the Tribunal of the canonical inquiries and the President of the latter, His Excellency Bishop Tyson, underlined this very significant and important coincidence and this was, of course, also done during the discussions which later took place in the Congregation.

I conclude this section by indicating some data concerning these discussions in the Congregations for the Causes of Saints:

- 15 September 2011: The Medical Board of the Congregation unanimously declares that the cure of Jacob is "*scientificamente inspiegabile*" (cannot be explained scientifically).
- 8 November 2011: The meeting of the Theologians ("*Il Congresso dei Teologi*") states that this scientifically inexplicable cure must be attributed to a divine intervention through the intercession of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha consecutive to her invocation on the part of the faithful.
- 13 December 2011: In their Ordinary Session the Cardinals and Bishops (Members of the Congregation) judge that the case in question (the cure of Jacob) is a true miracle to be ascribed to the intercession of the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.

Without indicating the precise date the following statement is added to the above mentioned data: "The Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI has authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the respective Decree about this miracle ("a promulgare il relativo *Decretum super miraculo*").

Two data must be added to this list:

- On Saturday 18 February 2012 His Holiness presided over an Ordinary Consistory on the occasion of the creation of 22 new Cardinals. After those who were entitled to cast a vote, had done so with regard to this question, the Holy Father also asked them whether they agreed to the canonization of seven Blessed, one of which was Kateri Tekakwitha on behalf of whom I had prepared a small booklet with all the relevant data concerning her life and her Cause. As in all the previous questions regarding this Cause, the answers of the votes were unanimously positive. At the end of this Consistory the Pope declared that he had decided to proceed with the

canonization of these seven Blessed and that their canonization would take place on Sunday, October 21, 2012.

- In a solemn ceremony on the said day, October 21, 2012, Blessed Kateri was canonized and thus declared a Saint who as such has to be recognized and venerated by all the faithful of the Catholic Church.

The canonization of Catherine Tekakwitha by Pope Benedict XVI carries a very special meaning that is bound to have wide-ranging pastoral consequences for the whole people of God, and, in a particular way, for the thirty million Amerindians of whom Catherine is the first to be raised to the honors of the altar. This young Iroquois woman, whose life was sustained by her Christian faith and by an ardent love of Jesus present in the Eucharist, found in Jesus Christ the strength to withstand the hostile pressure of the non-Christian culture in which she lived and to keep with heroic fidelity the vow of virginity which she pronounced on March 25, 1679.

In this way, poor and unlettered, but rich in the strength and beauty that God gives to the pure of heart, she becomes an accessible model for the young people of today who are so often subjected to intense and varied pressures that urge unchastity as the norm.

There is still another message conveyed by this canonization which has special bearing on contemporary pastoral commitment. In many dioceses of North America, both in Canada and in the United States, there are significant groups of native Indians, Eskimos and people of mixed Indian descent. There has been a growing pastoral concern in recent years to take seriously the cultural heritage of these communities, not only their languages, but also, and more importantly, their outlook, their customs, their special way of life, and the way in which all these influences shape their lives. Today the Church proclaims Catherine Tekakwitha a Saint. That fact alone is one of the most effective steps toward the development and promotion of a “local Church” that is authentically Indian.

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