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Our Native American Saint: Kateri Tekakwitha

Recognition

We hear in the Gospel of Mark 1:35-45 on October, 21, 2012, "Whoever would be great among you, must be your servant". This day, the realization of these words of Jesus are being fulfilled for hundreds of thousands of persons, many of whom are indigenous peoples from around the world. On October 21, 2012 in Rome a young American Indian woman is being officially canonized a Saint, a Holy woman for all of us to come to know and to learn from her life.



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Kateri's Life

Her name was Tekakwitha, and she received the name, Kateri or Catherine, when she was Baptized. As a very young Mohawk maiden, she walked in the forests and glens of America a whole century before there even was a United States. Today she is known and revered throughout the world, most especially by the Native Peoples here in North America. She was a true child of the continental wilderness that would be forged over the years into a mighty nation. She was also a child of the Creator of this land and chosen to experience a communion with God in prayer and contemplation which bore fruit in her loving and joyful service of all around her. She was truly a seed which would give birth to Christ's Life among her Native People and beyond.



Hardship and Early Values

Kateri gives witness to God's Presence in our humanity in a most remarkable and historic manner. Legend tells us she was born in the very place where St. Isaac Jogues and his Jesuit companions were martyred just ten years before. Her mother, Kahenta, was a member of Christian Canadian Tribe, but she had been abducted to become the wife of the leader of a warlike Mohawk clan here in America. Mohawk leaders did not trust the Christian missionaries and therefore rejected Christianity. So Kateri's mother was unable to practice her Christian

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faith while she lived among them. When Kateri was born, however, it is said that her mother, looking into the eyes of her beautiful child, called her the “Lily of the Mohawks”, a pre-view of the Light that would shine brightly through her and the perfume of her extraordinary holiness that would lovingly permeate this land later to be called America. Other than this, there was nothing in this child that would indicate she would be great among her people or a leader later on in her life. When she was still very young, a small pox epidemic swept through the Mohawk settlement and it seemed that Kateri was stripped of all that should would need to grow into womanhood much less a Saint. Her mother, father and small brother died, and Tekakwitha herself was left with scars disfiguring her whole face and severely damaging her eyesight.

She was adopted by an uncle, a tribal leader and brought to their camp-grounds near what is now Fonda, NY. It was here that three Jesuits began a mission among the Mohawk people. Having suffered so many afflictions in her short life, Kateri hungered for love and truth and goodness. She listened with all her heart and mind to the teachings of Jesus. Hearing how Jesus himself had suffered to make known the Father’s Love for all of us touched her deeply. Gradually over the years her whole being was transformed, and her only desire was to return this Love.

Love and Be Loved

On Easter Sunday in 1676, Kateri was able to speak out loud the Love that was transforming

Interesting Points

- First Native American Saint
 - Born 1656
 - Died April 17th, 1680 (age 24)
 - Feast day July 14th
 - Patron of the Environment and Ecology
-



“I am no longer my own. I have given myself entirely to Jesus Christ”

her whole being. She was baptized, soaked in the Life of the One who loved her. Those around her noticed the radiance in her face and the expression of Joy that totally transfigured her. Her service to all those around her become even more selfless and loving. She seemed different now, though, to her people. When it was time to marry, as all women in her tribe did, she chose not to do so. Many began to look at her as different, as one who no longer belonged. They belittled her Christianity and made fun of her. In the face of all this, however, she responded with loving service, continuing to find goodness in each of those around her.

Witnessing this, leaders from her mother’s tribe urged her to go back with them to Canada where she would be safe and would also be able to pray and practice her faith and grow in the Life of her Beloved Jesus. It was here too that Kateri vowed to live as one completely dedicated to Christ and God’s People. This final solemn commitment set a

seal on her Life. Her people called her their “treasure” because she came to truly embody Christ’s Life and love for them. Through the years, her health began to fail. The people knew that she would not be with them much longer and they found ways to honor her fleeting presence. Kateri Tekawitha died on the Wednesday of Holy week and her last words were simply “JESUS, I LOVE YOU”. As she drew last breath, her body took on a lustrous radiance and all of her scars are said to have disappeared from her face as the mourners watched in astonishment.

Impact Even After Death

As the news spread, native peoples from all over began special devotions to Kateri. It is said that she appeared to her friends at the mission soon after her death. Within months, favors were reported as a result of her intercession. Throughout the 333 years since her death, she has become this life-giving seed that began to blossom and bear fruit quietly among us. Her words “I AM NO LONGER MY OWN. I HAVE GIVEN MYSELF ENTIRELY TO JESUS CHRIST” became for Catholic Christian Native men and women throughout this country and beyond, a reason to come to know Jesus and the wonderful stories of God’s inclusive love for all peoples.



Steps to Official Sainthood

The official process of becoming a saint is called canonization, which means to be included in the canon (official list) of women and men acknowledged by the whole Church as faithful followers of the Gospel.

- 1) Five years must pass after the death of the person to test the enduring inspiration of the person’s life.
- 2) The Bishop of the candidate’s diocese names the person a Servant of God and forms a committee to prepare a report on his or her holiness.
- 3) If the report is deemed accurate by the Vatican, the person can be called by the title of Venerable, which means they are worthy of honor.
- 4) To become known as Blessed a miracle through the intercession of that person must take place. When the miracle is proven they are given the status of Blessed and they can be honored in a certain area, but not necessarily the entire universal Church.
- 5) The final step is when a second miracle through intercession of the person has been recognized. Once declared a saint the entire universal Church is called to honor this person.

Go Deeper

- 1) What difficulties in your life can St. Kateri Tekakwitha inspire you to overcome in order to serve the world better?
- 2) What holds you back from holiness in your life?
- 3) What does it mean to live your life as if it is not your own, but instead a gift from God to give to others? What implications would that attitude have on your life choices?



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