FOR PRIVATE DEVOTIONS

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"A New Star in the New World . . ."

Kateri Tekakwitha, the Lily of the Mohawks, was born of a pagan father and a Christian mother in 1656 at Ossernenon (Auriesville), a few miles from what is today Albany, N.Y. Some time before, the Mohawks had raided Three Rivers in Canada. The raiding chieftains brought home to the very spot, hallowed by the martyrdom of St. Isaac Jogues, St. John de La Lande and St. René Goupil, a young Algonquin captive who was to become the wife of one of them and the mother of Tekakwitha.

The child was still a little tot with beautiful, lustrous, black eyes and funny little pigtails when an epidemic of smallpox carried off her father, her mother and her baby brother.

People who had known her mother claimed that she was a good Catholic, that she prayed until her death and that perhaps her prayers later obtained the grace of Baptism for her daughter.

At any rate, Tekakwitha's "good nature," writes Father Chauchetière, her spiritual guide, "and the care her mother took of her when she was four or five years old went far to make her grow in age and wisdom." In later years, when Tekakwitha became a "praying Indian", the pagans of her lodge let her practice her new faith; her devotions, it seems, were tolerated because they had been accustomed to her mother's Christian way of life.

All those who visited the dying woman were convinced Tekakwitha would soon follow her. The child rallied. But her beauty was a thing of the past and her eyesight was so poor that she hid her head from the glare of the sun with a blanket. She was taken in charge by a bitterly anti-Catholic uncle. Everything appeared banded against her. And thus there began to shine forth, according to a Blackrobe who knew her, *"a new star in the New World..."*

PONDER AWHILE . . .

Few of us have begun life in worse circumstances than little Tekakwitha. But God's Providence drew much glory from her humble existence . . . Do I always manifest enough faith and confidence

in Him? . . . (*Now turn to page sixteen and read the Prayer for Kateri's Beatification.*)

A Little Girl Grows Up . . .

Already at the early age of seven, the Indian girls of Kateri's village enjoyed dressing up. Their mothers encouraged these petty vanities. " They spend a good deal of time, " wrote a missionary, " combing and braiding their daughters' locks. They see to it that their ears are pierced and begin from the cradle to pierce them. They paint their faces and cover themselves with beads when they are going to dance. "

Tekakwitha was of her people; she worked and played as a true Iroquois. She trotted in and out to get water for the members of her lodge. She was often invited by her aunt to accompany her when she went in search of wood; she tended the fire when she was asked to do so. Then again, she occasionally came home with a large basket of blueberries, possibly gathered on the banks of the Mohawk into which, a dozen years previous, the bodies of the Jesuit Martyrs had been thrown. Her skill and intelligence were remarkable. As she grew older, Tekakwitha was taught to work daintily with black and white porcupine and chestnut-colored moose bristles, to make bands

with which the Indian women carry wood, ceremonial belts also, from precious wampum. She even learned sewing, a recently acquired skill among the girls of her nation.

Often, however, she was left to her own devices. With her little head bent, her small fingers dexterous, she ably fashioned wampum rings for her fingers, necklaces and bracelets, and pretty ribbons dyed red with sturgeon-glue for her black hair. Her pagan aunt and uncle nodded in approval. Pock-marked Tekakwitha would need all this finery if she were to find herself a husband. And husband she must have for an Indian maiden easily became a burden to her lodge, if she had no one to bring her the pickings of a good hunt.

One companion her foster parents frowned upon, a companion that was to dog the little one throughout her life — suffering ! Her bad eyesight, in particular, kept her away from group games and locked her up on pleasant days within the gloominess of the long house.

Later on Tekakwitha was to rue bitterly her childhood concessions to vanity. Tears and harsh penances were to make up for them. To her dying day she was to thank Good for the ill health and bad eyes that safeguarded her from the sins of pagan adolescence.

PONDER AWHILE . . .

Tekakwitha, living in pagandom, was a good child. So was I, in my own small way. Since then, taking into account the talents which God gave to me, have I paralleled Kateri's spiritual life?

(*Now turn to page sixteen and read the Prayer for Kateri's Beatification.*)

"I Have Already Decided What I Am Going to Do!"

God's loving Hand had been at work when smallpox scarred the beautiful features of four-year-old Tekakwitha. He desired her for Himself. Ordinarily young men do not think much of girls with marred complexions . . .

Her foster parents tried their utmost to induce Tekakwitha to marry. At the very early age of eight, she was given in marriage to a boy of her own age. But this ceremony was no more than an agreement, common enough among the Iroquois, which served to strengthen the ties of friendship between two families. The boy thought no more about this " marriage " than did Tekakwitha, and it was soon forgotten.

Several years later a snare was set to draw her into wedlock. An Indian brave was ushered into her lodge and told to sit down beside her. He well understood what this meant: if the girl offered him some saganité, she became his wife. Tekakwitha instantly fled from the long house and hid

behind a cache of Indian maize. Such conduct was unheard of on the part of an Iroquois maiden.

Time and time again the matter was pressed. Ill treatment was dispensed; sarcasm, which must have hurt deeply, was flung in her direction, but Tekakwitha, who was no fool, parried each attack with amusing repartees.

After Tekakwitha's conversion, the Iroquois woman under whose roof she lived at the Mission of Saint Francis Xavier, again tried to force wedded bliss upon her. She was a strong-willed creature and did all in her power to succeed. Kateri's intimate friend and adviser, good Anastasia, was drawn into the plot. The whole matter was finally laid before Kateri's confessor. Then the Lily of the Mohawks pronounced the vow of perpetual virginity:

" I have thought it over long enough; I have already decided what I am going to do; I cannot put it off any longer. I have dedicated myself to Jesus, Son of Mary; I have taken Him for my Spouse and only He shall have me as a Spouse. "

PONDER AWHILE . . .

" To the unmarried, " wrote St. Paul, " and to the widows, I would say that they will do well to

remain in the same state as myself, but if they have not the gift of continence, let them marry . . . " Kateri Tekakwitha harkened to the advice of the Apostle of the Gentiles. Are my opinions concerning purity and chastity in perfect conformity with the teachings of the Church? . . . (*Now turn to page sixteen and read the Prayer for Kateri's Beatification.*)

Fourth Day

"My Name Is 'Christian'!"

Tekakwitha first saw the French Blackrobes in the early autumn of 1667, and then, only for a few days. She was eleven years old. Three Jesuit Fathers were the guests of her pagan uncle, quite against his will, and Tekakwitha was ordered to serve them. This brief meeting seems to have predisposed her to the Faith.

In 1674, Father James de Lamberville, who permanently resided at the Iroquois Mission of Saint Peter, now Fonda, N.Y., gave public instructions to a few Mohawks courageous enough to ignore the general antagonism to the Catholic Church prevalent among their fellow-pagans. Tekakwitha apparently was present at these sermons, but through fear of her uncle or through shyness, or perhaps through both, never manifested her desire for Baptism to the Jesuit.

One autumn day in 1675, as Father de Lamberville was passing in front of her lodge, on impulse, he entered. No one should have been there, for the Iroquois harvested their corn at that season of the year. Much to his surprise, the missionary found Tekakwitha, forced to remain at home

because of a sore foot. The Iroquois maiden opened up her heart to Father James and revealed how eagerly she desired to receive Baptism. He invited her to come regularly to the chapel to pray.

Soon Father de Lamberville, edified by her profound piety, decided to accept her into the Church though he generally tried an adult two or three years before conferring Baptism. A careful investigation into her life and character convinced him that Tekakwitha was indeed a worthy candidate.

All that winter, she took instructions much as any modern convert, coming back to the Faith of his ancestors, takes them. Her prayers, Kateri rapidly memorized, for fear of seeing Baptism delayed.

On Easter Sunday, April 5, 1676, in the Mission church of St. Pater, the priest questioned her:

"Do you wish to be baptized?"

"I do," she answered and forthwith she was solemnly christened Kateri in the presence of the faithful.

But during the next two years she was known only by the name of "Christian". Her other names were forgotten. It was the most injurious taunt the devil could imagine.

PONDER AWHILE . . .

What does my Baptism mean to me? Does it mean as much to me as it did to Kateri? . . . Have I ever taken the time to read attentively the detailed ceremonies of Solemn Baptism? . . . (*Now turn to page sixteen and read the Prayer for Kateri's Beatification.*)

On September 20, 1694
Father Claude Chauchetière, S.J.
wrote to Father James Jouheneau, S.J.
of Bordeaux, France:

. . . I beg the Reverend Father Rector of the Novitiate to have his Novices say a Pater, *and* Ave *and the* Gloria Patri *three times for me. This is a devotion practiced here among the Indians and the French, who go to the tomb of Kateri, who is interred in the church of the Sault, when they wish to obtain some favor from God. I began it on the very day of her burial; and I have always believed that it was she who at the end of the year saved me, when our chapel was blown down by the storm. Then, in the opinion of all, I was miraculously saved; and I believed that this virtuous Indian repaid me on that occasion for the services that I rendered her during her illness . . .*

In 1696,
Father Peter Cholenec,
Kateri's second spiritual guide,
noted in his biography
of the Lily of the Mohawk:

. . . In the following year, 1681, on the first of September, and in 1682, on the twenty-first of April, this same person (Father Chauchetière, S.J.) had a similar vision under the same circumstances, with this one difference, that in the first apparition he had seen Kateri as a rising sun, and had heard these words: Adhuc vini (sic) in dies, *whereas in the two following he saw her as a sun in mid-heaven with these words:* Inspice et fac secundum exemplar (*Exod. 25:40*), *God thus making it known that He wished pictures to be painted of Kateri. For a long time we had refrained from doing so, but when they were painted later on they contributed a great deal toward making Kateri known, for, being placed on the heads of the sick, they brought about marvelous cures . . .*

PRAYER

for the Beatification of

Kateri Tekakwitha

O God, Who, among the manifold marvels of Thy Grace in the New World, didst cause to blossom on the banks of the Mohawk and of the St. Lawrence, the pure and tender Lily, Kateri Tekakwitha, grant, we beseech Thee, the favor we beg through her intercession — that this Little Lover of Jesus and of His Cross may soon be raised to the honors of the altar 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.*

Our Father and *Hail Mary*, once, and *Glory be to the Father*, three times.

Emile BRUNET, *sculpsit.*

"I Send You a Treasure..."

Ogeratarihen (Hot Ashes), the well-known Catholic Oneida, accompanied by a Huron and by one of Kateri's cousins from the Mission of Saint Francis Xavier, paid a visit to St. Peter's Mission in the autumn of 1677.

The elders of the village were the first Indians to receive the newcomers, but soon a crowd gathered. Hot Ashes spoke to his countrymen and invited them to enter into the one true Fold. His audience, whose curiosity for religion was soon satisfied, began to dwindle away. Kateri Tekakwitha, however, stayed until the end.

The priest often had advised her to flee to the Mission of Saint Francis Xavier on the banks of the St. Lawrence where she could practice her religion in peace. In the past, this suggestion had frightened her. Her uncle, whose wrath she feared, was then trading with the English at Fort Orange and she felt quite calm at the prospect of leaving him. The Jesuit broached the subject to Hot Ashes who replied: "There will be room in the canoe for her, since I intend to go to the Oneidas and preach the faith among the Iroquois nations."

So began her long two-hundred mile trek through the red and gold wildwood. Her uncle, informed that she had escaped, loaded his gun with three bullets and hastened after the little group of three. He met Kateri's cousin . . . but passed by, not knowing that the strange Indian was one of those he sought . . .

When Kateri learned of this, she interpreted it as a sign of heavenly approbation: "Her journey was a continual prayer and the joy which she felt in approaching Montreal cannot be put in words."

Fathers Fremin and Cholenec were the first to read the note their friend Father de Lamberville had entrusted to Tekakwitha for them: "I send you a treasure; guard it well!" Ignoring the contents of the letter but realizing that she had no longer anything to fear from her uncle, Kateri Tekakwitha gave herself entirely into the hands of God. He would guard His treasure.

PONDER AWHILE . . .

Kateri ran away from sin, from temptations against purity and against her faith. And I? . . .

(*Now turn to page sixteen* and *read the Prayer for Kateri's Beatification.*)

Unconditional Surrender!...

Kateri made her First Holy Communion on Christmas Day, 1677, a few months after her arrival at the Mission. In those times, Indian neophytes were subjected to a trial of several years before they were privileged to receive Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrement. The missionaries wished to give them a high opinion of the Holy Eucharist. This rule, according to Father Cholenec, did not hold for her; " she was too well disposed and desired with too great an eagerness to receive Our Lord, to be deprived of this great grace, so she was promised some time before the feast that she might receive Him on Christmas, after she had been instructed in the mystery. "

She knew beforehand, and this was one of the deep joys which she tasted, that for the first time, the Savior of Mankind with His infinite Love would visit her. Kateri Tekakwitha, the little illiterate Indian girl, who never went to confession without weeping profusely because she thought of herself as the greatest sinner alive (she was of angelic innocence) was to welcome her Redeemer

into her heart ! It is easy to understand her increasing joy as the great day approached. Her first biographers mention her " unconditional surrender to this furnace of sacred love that burns on our altars. "

After that Christmas at the Mission of Saint Francis Xavier, Kateri was different. Her fervor was renewed and she remained, after her First Communion " full of God and of love of Him . . . "

Detail worthy of note, as long as she lived, the good women of the Mission hurried to find a place next to her in church. The mere sight of her was an excellent preparation for Communion.

PONDER AWHILE . . .

Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is Somebody, not something. Kateri *knew* this and this knowledge changed her life. Her First Communion left her with a heart completely and definitely altered. The Heart of Jesus and her heart seemed to have merged into one . . . I too, need to go to Communion with thoughts like Kateri's . . . Is it possible nowadays, among the temptations that beset me at every corner, to live in the state of grace without receiving practically each week that Somebody Who is the Lord and Savior of the Universe ? . . .

(Now turn to page sixteen and read the Prayer for Kateri's Beatification.)

"My Jesus, I Must Suffer for Thee!..."

The scion of a haughty Italian family of the Renaissance, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, and a little girl of the Mohawks, Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha, have much in common. Both are famed for the innocence of their lives, for their penitential role in making up for the sins of their people and for their untimely deaths.

Kateri knew and admired the extraordinary austerities of St. Aloysius, but few of us know about Kateri's. Our twentieth-century sensibilities shudder at the mere listing of them. Kateri always prepared her confessions by having a devout friend scourge her. The third stroke drew blood, but the blows kept raining down upon her shoulders. A thousand to twelve hundred blows each Saturday.

Once in the middle of winter, Kateri walked barefoot on the sharp ice of a pond. Off and on, when the temperature was below freezing, she went without fire. She wore an iron-spiked cincture. One evening, her heart pierced with sorrow for her

sins, she burned herself from toe to knee with firebrands. Until her friends stopped her, she would go without eating each Wednesday and Saturday. After a meditation on the Passion of Our Savior, she lined the bark which served as her mat with sharp thorns. Her confessor, who had not been consulted (Kateri simply wished to imitate St. Aloysius), instantly regulated her ascetic practices when he discovered them.

To be sure, Kateri's austerities disconcert our modern pagan way of thinking just as the Marquis of Castiglione's macerations had scandalized the good folk of his day. The following words could have been said by St. Aloysius: "My Jesus, I must suffer for Thee; I love Thee, but I have offended Thee. It is to satisfy Thy justice that I am here. Vent on me, O God, Thy anger." But it was Kateri who uttered them.

PONDER AWHILE . . .

Tekakwitha did not love the Cross for itself. She loved it because it is the only Way to Jesus. What about my penances? Penances that fit in with my health, my work, my age. Is my Christianity watered-down? . . . (*Now turn to page sixteen and read the Prayer for Kateri's Beatification.*)

" My Soul Is Ready to Die With Sorrow... "

In the Garden of Olives, " My soul, " Jesus said, " is ready to die with sorrow . . . " (Mt. XXVI, 38).

Kateri mirrored this phase of our Savior's suffering in her life. Tongues unkind, razor-sharp, slashed away at her reputation and immersed her in sorrow. In the spring of the year following her Baptism, Tekakwitha accompanied her people during the hunting season. One of her aunts, possibly envious of her exemplary life, spied on her in order to discredit her with Father de Lamberville.

It was then the custom among the Iroquois for nieces to call their uncles *father*. Once or twice Tekakwitha forgot this and simply adressed her uncle by his name. His wife rushed to the missionary and blamed her niece:

" So Kateri, whom you think is so virtuous, is after all a hypocrite who deceives you. Even in my presence she solicited my husband to sin ! "

After questioning Kateri, the priest completely exonerated her and remained convinced that the Holy Ghost had always preserved this flower of His garden from the slightest taint.

In Canada she suffered too, only more so. Her first biographer gives two reasons for this: her belief that among Christians she would no longer be subjected to slander and the nature of the untruth hurled against her.

A good Christian woman, but " somewhat given to backbiting " misinterpreting certain occurrences, thought that Kateri was trying to steal her husband's heart and denounced her to one of the Fathers.

One evening, this woman's husband, after hunting for elk all day, entered into the long house at a late hour. He threw himself on the nearest pallet and soon fell asleep. The next morning his wife noticed that he had slept next to Tekakwitha. Her suspicions were confirmed when she heard him ask Kateri to mend his canoe.

The missionary, informed of these happenings, spoke to Kateri. " Whatever . . . she might say then, " writes Chauchetière, " she was not entirely believed . . . and what hurt most was that the Father . . . accused her as if she had been guilty. " I know of no better ending to these lines than the same writer's conclusion: " The actual thorns of which she made use for penance, were only a symbol of the interior thorns that were meant to try her soul ! "

PONDER AWHILE . . .

Kateri accepted this suffering with great patience. Does an unkind remark, thoughtlessly uttered, upset me, anger me? . . . (*Now turn to page sixteen and read the Prayer for Kateri's Beatification.*)

" Jesus ! Mary ! I Love You ! "

Kateri knew she was going to die. For over six months, fever assailed her; acute pains gnawed at her head and stomach; for days on end depressing spells of weakness kept her bedridden. Each morning her friends, obliged to work in the fields, left her alone in her lodge with a plate of sagamité and a goblet of water; then through the long day solitude enveloped her . . .

How did this twenty-three-year-old girl react ?... Joy, great joy marked her during these last months. She felt secure in the knowledge that she was giving God what He asked of her. Kateri's " surprising gaiety . . . her smiling face which clearly showed the peace of her mind ", impressed Father Cholenec. " In her inmost soul, " he adds " she delighted in her God with an abundance of joy and spiritual satisfaction . . . "

On Tuesday of Holy Week he brought her the Holy Viaticum. A great privilege to have Our Lord come into her long house ! It was the first time this honor was granted at the Mission. Heretofore the sick were carried to church on a wooden plank.

Everyone in the village wanted to be present at the death of the saintly maiden.

Then follows the delightful scene of the missionary rushing from the lodge to the church. One can see his black habit streaming out behind him. Poor Father ! he was reproaching himself for not having given Tekakwitha Extreme Unction sooner. But he need not have worried. Kateri told him and her friend Marie Therese Tegaiaguenta that she would notify them when the hour of her death arrived.

About ten o'clock the next day, the dying girl asked for the Sacraments, which she received with great devotion. She encouraged her friend never to abandon mortification and promised to love her in heaven. Then she spoke no longer. To the end, her hearing was good, and if an act of love of God was suggested, her face brightened up. Her last words admirably sum up her entire life: " Jesus ! Mary ! I love You ! " It was Wednesday of Holy Week, April 17, 1680.

At the time of her death, Kateri's swarthy features still retained the pockmarks of her childhood. Scarcely a quarter of an hour had elapsed when Father Cholenec, who had been praying beside her, cried out in amazement. Kateri's

countenance had become very beautiful, somewhat as it had been when she was a very small child. Doubtless, as the priest and her own kin remarked, a small ray of the glory of which her soul had taken possession, was reflected in her chaste body.

PONDER AWHILE . . .

To die happily one must live happily. Kateri's death was happy because her whole life had been happy — spiritually speaking. My death also, will be happy, if today and tomorrow and every day my soul is at peace with God . . . if it is happy ! . . .

(*Now turn to page sixteen and read the Prayer for Kateri's Beatification.*)