



## Catherine Tegakwitha, First Iroquois Virgin Cholenec

Peter Cholenec, priest of the Society of Jesus, was born in 1640 at St. Pol-de-Leon, Brittany, became a Jesuit in 1658 and died in Quebec in 1723.

For forty-nine years, 1674 until his death, he was a missionary in Canada. Nearly all that time he was among the Indians at St. Francis Xavier. Tekakwitha spent her last years (1677-1680) under his spiritual direction.

He was distinguished for his holiness, learning and skill in administering the affairs of the mission. He wrote several brief accounts of the life and virtues of Tekakwitha and her reputation for holiness, one of which has appeared in several languages. This is his complete Life of the Indian maiden. The French manuscript has been preserved in a remarkable manner since he wrote it in 1695. The original was never published and this English translation is the first appearance of the Life in print. It is a valuable document and the translation is well worth keeping.

### CHAPTER I

Catherine Tegakwitha, who today is so famous in New France because of the extraordinary marvels which God has performed and continues to perform everywhere through her intercession, was born among the Iroquois in the year 1656 in the village of Agniers, called Gandaouage. Her mother, who was of the Algonquin nation, had been baptized and raised among the French in the city of Three Rivers. It was there she was captured by the Iroquois, who were then waging war with us, and who carried her off as a slave to their country. She lived among them and soon after was married to an Indian of that nation, by whom she had two children, boy and a girl, Catherine.

It was told of this virtuous woman, as it has been said before her of the holy man Tobias, that she preserved her Faith and the fear of God in captivity, that she always prayed until her last breath, but that she had neither the time nor the consolation to inspire these praiseworthy sentiments in her two children, and that if she had the joy of bringing them into the world, she also had the sorrow of leaving it without having them baptized, which was her one desire.

An epidemic of small-pox broke out among the Iroquois and killed a great many. She also died from the disease, leaving her two children who were still very young and incapable of taking care of themselves. She

prayed to Him, Who was their Creator, that He might also be their Father and take them under His divine protection. We see in the person of our Catherine that God heard so just a prayer; as for her brother, he died from the same sickness a little while after his mother. Catherine also caught this disease, but Our Lord, Who had chosen her to be His bride, so that in her the marvels of His grace might shine forth, saved her from death. She remained very weak for the rest of her life; her eyes especially were so affected that she was not able to suffer broad daylight, but was obliged during her entire life to hide her face in her blanket when she left the cabin. Thus she is always portrayed unlike the other savages, who wear their blankets on the shoulders.

We have not been able to ascertain what became of her father; we only know that Catherine, being orphaned at the age of four, lived with her uncle, one of the most important seniors of the village. Her aunts, who took all the more care of her since they hoped to benefit by it in the future, succeeded in giving her a good formation.

The child had a lovable disposition; she was sweet and as she grew in years she also grew visibly in goodness; all her inclinations tended to virtue. God, Who wished her for Himself, inspired her early with love of work and solitude; it may be said that these two inclinations were the two sources of the innocent life she led in the country of the Iroquois. She only went out in public when she had some purpose to accomplish, she was always at work in the lodge, contrary to the custom of the young Iroquois girls, who like to visit each other, and divert themselves together for entire days. What was still more admirable in her was the natural horror she had of all that was against purity. This horror made her flee any kind of society or assembly, and led her to avoid dressing as the other savage girls. However, she allowed herself to be led even in that by her aunts,

with the sole purpose of obeying and pleasing them. Later, however, she regarded this compliance as one of the greatest sins of her life, and made it a motive for shame and atoned for it with tears of repentance. This same horror of impurity and love which she felt inwardly for chastity, without yet knowing its merit, made her refuse matrimony constantly when she was of a marriageable age. Her aunts wished to oblige her to marry, but she evaded their efforts two or three times with great dexterity. They even wished to compel her by force, by threats and by illicit means. Catherine always resisted with great determination, and, by a particular grace of Our Lord, Who doubtlessly watched over the purity of His future spouse, she escaped successfully from all these snares which were set for her.

She had to pay dearly for this firmness, which her aunts looked upon as madness and unbearable stubbornness, and as something extraordinary among the Iroquois. Henceforward she had a great deal to suffer in the lodge, where she was no longer looked upon as a child of the house but as an ill-treated slave, whom one rebuffed and treated with severity at every opportunity. She behaved with such patience and sweetness, however, in the midst of these rebuffs and ill-treatments and had such deference for her aunts in all other matters, that she soon regained their affection. They spoke no more to her of marriage and let her live in peace in her own way without further troubling her. Thus God turned this small persecution to good for His faithful servant, and prepared her for receiving the greatest of all graces, Holy Baptism, which was the only thing lacking to make her a holy girl and give the final perfection to so many natural good qualities that shone forth in her.

Father James de Lamberville had already been living for some time in the village of Gandaouage when Catherine, who had not heard his instructions, felt a great desire to



become a Christian. Her timidity, or her natural modesty, however, was so great that although she longed to speak to the priest and open her heart to him, God saw to it that she had the means of gratifying her wish, when she least thought so. It was autumn of the year 1676 and all the women were busy harvesting. Since our Catherine, as we have said, could not suffer the broad daylight on account of the weakness of her eyes, her aunts at that season intrusted her with the care of the lodge and all the domestic affairs while they worked in the fields, so that she spent the days in solitude. It was at this time that the missionary, one day, making his regular visits at the lodges, and having already passed hers because he believed no one to be at home, felt inspired to turn back and to enter there. He did so, and found the young girl, who showed extraordinary pleasure in this visit for which she had longed so much. The Father on his side was most edified by her modesty and reserve, but he was even more so when he had spoken with her and had learned what a virtuous life she led. He was delighted to discover so many virtues in this young savage. He recognized clearly that the Holy Ghost had enlightened the eyes of her soul to see, and had touched her heart to embrace the truth of our religion. For this reason he resolved and promised, at this first interview, to grant her the grace she so ardently desired, I mean Baptism. After having passed the entire winter in teaching her thoroughly and preparing her to receive this sacrament, they appointed a day for it; this was accomplished all the easier since her aunts, instead of being opposed to it, as one might have feared, had already been baptized themselves.

Father de Lamberville, who foresaw the great profits that his new church might draw from the Baptism of a girl of her character, wished to confer it solemnly on the feast of Easter. On this great day he baptized her in the presence of all the Christians of the

village, whom he had assembled in order to render the ceremony more impressive, and gave her the name of Catherine, a name already consecrated by the purity of many holy virgins, and to which one may say she added greater glory.

All those who assisted were touched by the modesty and devotion which she showed during the ceremony and they evinced great joy in this Baptism, esteeming themselves fortunate in possessing among their small number a person so perfect and so greatly admired in the village. Not only did they hope by her piety she would adorn the religion she had just embraced, but that she would draw many others to follow her example. It did not take a long time to observe that they had been justified in the favorable opinion that everyone had formed in this matter. Catherine not only justified their hope, but surpassed it by the fervor she showed after Baptism, so that one had reason to believe that the Holy Ghost filled with His grace a soul so disposed to receive it by an innocence of a manner of life which may be called angelic. All these beautiful virtuous dispositions which until then she had confined to the precincts of her lodge, shone forth as soon as she was obliged to appear in public to assist at the common exercises of piety with the neophytes, and since her own character, as we shall see, was such that she was perfect from the beginning, she soon surpassed all the others, and in less than a few months became for her companions a model of humility, devotion, sweetness, charity and all the other Christian virtues; so that if one had respected her in the beginning, one would soon have felt admiration for a virtue so young and already so solid.

Catherine remained for a year and a half in her country after she had been baptized, always showing the same zeal and daily making new progress in virtue. Father de Lamberville himself greatly admired her, but he judged wisely that so ungrateful and wicked

a soil as that of the Iroquois was incapable of making that young flower grow, capable of spoiling and unworthy of possessing it. For this reason he wished to transplant it to a better ground, where it might take root safely and be out of danger of corruption. The Mission of Saint Francis Xavier of the Sault had existed for some years among the French at the Prairie of Madeleine opposite the city of Montreal, and it was only a year before that it had been changed from this place to the foot of the Sault Saint Louis, from whence it obtained its name. Since we were at peace with the Iroquois at that time, many were drawn to this spot for the pleasant restfulness which might be enjoyed in it; these soon became baptized, following the example of several Huron families, already established there. These fervent Christians led such an edifying life that it was even felt by the French who were witnesses of it, that this mission was a living picture of the primitive Church. The Iroquois, who came there from their country to visit their parents, were so edified by it that they returned home as so many panegyrists to tell of the marvels they had witnessed at the Sault, so that it became the sole topic of conversation among the Iroquois, which drew a great number to that place who wished to share the happiness of their compatriots, particularly from Agniers.

It was there that Father Lamberville thought God wished to see our Catherine. She herself, for some time, had greatly desired to be there, so that when the Father mentioned it to her, they found that they had the same thought and it only remained to await a favorable occasion for the execution of their plan. Divine Providence soon showed the way. Catherine had an older sister by adoption who had for some years been living at this mission with her husband. Her desire to have Catherine share their happiness led her to make her husband depart with several others who went to see their

parents so that Catherine might be brought there. This man explained his purpose to her when he arrived and Catherine felt a joy it would be difficult to express. Her aunts seemed willing that she should go, but everything was to be feared from her uncle, who was very powerful in the village and who strongly opposed these transigrations which unpeopled his country to populate ours.

Fortunately for Catherine, however, heaven interfered. This uncle at the time was negotiating with the English at Albany, so that they profited by these favorable circumstances to start their journey. They had scarcely left the village when her uncle returned there and asked where his niece was. They told him that she had left for the Sault; he immediately took his gun, loaded it with three bullets to shoot, so it was said, the person who had taken the young girl from him, and began his pursuit. As he wasted no time, he had no difficulty in overtaking them. They saw him coming from afar, and as they were doubtful as to his plans, they hid Catherine in the woods, while the others sat down by the road as if to eat. Coming upon them, he asked them very abruptly where his niece was. They answered that they had seen her in the village and that they could not tell him anything else about her, whereupon the old man, God doubtlessly wishing it to be so, turned back without making any further effort to find her. When he was out of sight, they continued on their way to the Mission of the Sault, where Catherine arrived in the autumn of 1677, with a treasure of merit for herself and splendid examples for us, to the glory of God and the great profit of that Mission and of the entire French colony, of which she now is a powerful protectress against its visible and invisible enemies.

## CHAPTER II

God, Who from all eternity had chosen Catherine Tegakwitha so that in her the



marvels of His grace might shine forth, did not allow that she should live any longer in that abominable land, which did not deserve to possess her, but He sent her to the Sault to fortify that mission in its early days and to edify it by the example of an angelic life.

Reverend Father Frémin, one of the great missionaries of Canada, was then in charge of that mission; Father Chauchetière and I were there with him. Catherine was directed to me by Father James de Lamber ville; the letter that she brought from him contained this passage: "Catherine Tegakwitha is going to live at the Sault. I beg of you to take charge of her conduct. We are giving you a treasure, as you will soon realize, guard it well therefore, and help it to improve for the glory of God and the salvation of a soul that certainly is very dear to Him."

On this recommendation the Father wished that I should take upon myself the charge of the conduct of this newcomer, since I was already in charge of the instruction given to the savages, either for Baptism or for the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist.

Catherine, after arriving at the Sault, went to live at the home of her brother-in-law, who had brought her into the country. The mistress of the cabin was an old Christian, Anastasia by name, who was among the first

of the Iroquois to be baptized by our Fathers. She was one of the pillars of the mission, a most fervent member of the Confraternity of the Holy Family, and of the entire village, the one who knew best how to instruct.

This woman had known Catherine when she was little and also her deceased mother in their country. She aided her greatly at the

Sault in progressing in virtue, because beside the fact that she took the place of her mother, she was also her principal instructress, and it is under these two names that we shall mention her in the future.

If one has read attentively all that was said in Chapter I, it is easy to conclude that Catherine lived among the Iroquois as in a strange country, not her own, although she had been born there, for sin prevails in it, whereas she was born to be virtuous. The country of the Sault, on the contrary, seemed her native land, and if God owed so virtuous a girl to this



PORTRAIT OF KATERI, 1681

*By one of her spiritual advisers, Chauchetière*

mission, one may also say that He owed to Catherine so holy a mission where for several years her compatriots had retired in order to profess the Christian religion, and where they lived with all the piety of a new Church.

In fact the mission was very fervent at that time; they spoke of God alone, they thought only of serving Him, and did not limit themselves to the mere obedience to the commandments of God, but observed

even the practise of the Evangelical Counsels; in one word, everybody was living a life of holiness, the youngest as well as the oldest, each emulating the other, and almost all the lodges were schools of virtue and holiness. Catherine at once observed these beautiful things, she met the new converts with pleasure, her relatives and friends, and she noticed the change in their way of living. She admired the Christian life, so very different from the one they had led a short time ago in their country. She compared what they were here with what they had been there, and then reflecting gravely on their happiness and on her own, she felt an unbelievable joy to find herself, after a fortunate exile from another Egypt, happily transplanted to this promised land, where she finally found what she had sought for such a long time, without even knowing what it was.

She could not speak of it to us without ecstasies. As she was noble and generous of heart and quick of spirit, and since, as far as we were able to discover, she possessed an insatiable desire to learn what was good, and an equal ardor to put into practise what she had once learned, her well-disposed soul caught fire, and, placing her own strength to the work, she began to practise those things which she saw the others doing; she did them so well and with such noticeable progress that within less than a few weeks she distinguished herself among all the girls and women of the mission. She soon gained the esteem and admiration of everybody, so that Catherine Tegakwitha, after having been preserved for more than twenty years among the wicked and the sinful, now soon became a saint here among the just and the faithful.

It is doubtlessly surprising to see how far this young girl advanced in piety during the two years and a half (approximately) that she lived at the Sault, but it is more astonishing still that she possessed such virtue almost from the very beginning. It may in truth

be said of her that she never was a novice in the exercise of virtue, but that she had been accomplished in it from the beginning and that she attained perfection with such rapidity that she had the Holy Ghost for her teacher.

Catherine was not satisfied with an ordinary life; driven by this insatiable desire for good and by her extreme fervor to undertake and accomplish much, she began by embracing what was most perfect. She took for her principal, or rather her only, maxim, to seek in all things what would be most pleasing to God, not to reserve anything from Him and to make it a rule to give Him everything that depended on her, without any respect for creatures and without any return for herself. So holy a maxim had as its foundation the exalted idea that she was made to the likeness of God, and the extreme gratefulness she felt and retained during her entire life for the great grace God had bestowed on her in choosing her among so many others whom He left in darkness, to see the Light of the Gospel, and to understand its true meaning at the mission of the Sault.

With such beautiful principles and such powerful and efficacious motives to conduct herself, the first thing our virtuous savage did was to attach herself to the holy place and to make the church her dearest and most habitual refuge, certain of always finding Him to Whom she had already consecrated her heart and all her affections. In order to converse with Him there far from all noise and without any distractions from creatures, she went there every morning as early as four o'clock, even during the severest winter weather. She heard the first Mass at the break of day and the Mass for the Indians at sunrise. She returned several times during the day, interrupting her work to satisfy her devotion. Finally, she returned there in the evening after her work, and did not leave until late at night. First in the morning to enter, she was the last in the evening to leave.



## KATERIANA

This month THE LILY OF THE MOHAWKS begins its third year. This is auspicious; the month is dedicated to the Rosary and to the Angels. The Rosary is one of Tekakwitha's emblems: the horrible conditions in which she lived needed special angel guardianship. It is the month of the Little Flower: Terese was the garden, Kateri the wild flower of holiness.

The May Message announced that we were to begin publishing in English the famous Life of Tekakwitha, existing only in manuscript nearly two hundred and fifty years. Then came the Indian petitions that appeared in June and July; then the great news of the findings of the Roman Congregation in favor of such documents as Cholenec's. By September material had accumulated, and it is only in this number we can make good our promise, as also to have a picture of Kateri in each number.

His Eminence Rodrigue Villeneuve, O.M.I., Cardinal of Quebec, returned by way of New York from his visit to the Holy Father as Legate of the Quebec Eucharistic Congress, with encouraging news about the progress of the Cause of Tekakwitha.

On the same steamer were many church dignitaries, members of the Commission appointed to identify and obtain a relic of Ven. Mother Cabrini, among them Monsignor Salvatore Natucci, General Promoter of the Faith for causes of beatification and canonization, who also brought encouraging news.

Monsignor Egidio Vagnozzi, Auditor of the Apostolic Delegation in Washington, also arrived that morning. He had presented to the Holy Father the petitions of our Indian tribes in the United States and Canada expressing their desire for Kateri's beatification,

and His Holiness referred them to the Congregation of Rites.

We owe it to Pius XI that causes like Kateri's proceed rapidly. Formerly a cause had to be examined under the Bishop of the Diocese in which a Servant of God had died or lived many years. When considered favorably in Rome, this process had to be repeated by papal mandate. To avoid this, His Holiness established the Historical Section of the Congregation of Rites for causes for which there are no eye-witnesses to the life and holiness of the person concerned. This Section has concluded its work in a manner to make further conduct of our Cause easy and rapid.

Tekakwitha Friary made its bow to the Mohawk Valley in a very dignified manner, Sunday, September 11, on the high and broad plateau where Kateri lived for ten years after she left her Auriesville birthplace and where she was baptized. The Franciscan Conventuals, now in possession of the site, greeted the Most Reverend Bishop of the diocese of Albany, Edmund F. Gibbons, the Hon. Harry B. Bush, Mayor of Canajoharie and President of the Mohawk Valley Historical Society, Congressman Byrne and the son of the State Historian, Dr. Flick, who all addressed the large audience of devotees of Kateri. The program closed with the Way of the Cross and Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

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"Enclosed is what I received today for papers and rags saved just for this purpose."

THE LILY OF THE MOHAWKS should be eight pages instead of four. But that costs money. In fact, it is supported now as much by gifts as by subscriptions. We are printing eight pages now and we shall keep it that number, if subscriptions justify it.

## TEKAKWITHA "MOVETH ALL BEFORE HER"

To print all, or even part of the letters we receive telling remarkable things about Tekakwitha would require many pages. Every month there is copy left over. No doubt it was noticed last month that many priests, sisters and men and women of the laity reported substantial temporal favors, money needed, positions obtained, business transactions. Still many more were crowded out.

Thus a Mission school at Komatke, Arizona, needed \$1,600.00 and got more with promises of further aid.

Some one at Andover, Mass., needed \$1,000.00 and next day received a promise of it.

A poor country church needed \$325.00 for repairs. In a few weeks that amount came and more.

In Brooklyn \$400.00 needed was obtained by a school affair.

A priest at Columbus, Mont., had built a mission with little money and little encouragement. "She helped me wonderfully."

A mother reports that three days after she finished praying her daughter received a better position with double her former salary.

A Baltimore woman gives thanks for a position much better than she had asked.

A man in Minneapolis needed money badly. Soon he received \$1,000.00—"right out from the blue sky."

Many report several favors, *e.g.*, one from Enid, Okla., "aid in financial difficulties, employment, relief from a physical affliction of long standing."

Similar reports come from Troy, N. Y., and Pompton Lakes, N. J.

Pastor writes from Merrill, Mich.: "Little Catherine has done a great deal for my parish and myself personally."

Remarkable cures are daily reported. Kateri seems to favor the aged. From Chihuahua, Mexico, comes word: "An old lady got well from a serious fever."

One, 86 years old, in Lynn, Mass., fell downstairs and was paralyzed. She is well.

One of 72 years, in Wilmington, Del., with diabetes, had her leg amputated, and is now well, although the doctor told her she would not survive.

Over a year ago another not yet so old was in a dying condition twenty-four hours. The next day she was better and has been ever since.

Still the Indian Maiden has no preferences. In Lackawanna, N. Y., a little tot got well without an operation after suffering two weeks from mastoid.

A pastor reports that a friend suffering from bleeding cancer and melancholia, and not expected to live, is now well after application of Kateri's relic.

Let every subscriber for this monthly message get one more subscriber. To help all to do this we are sending a sample copy to show some friend, and shall send more if desired. At least send us names and addresses of those who might subscribe.

In a Milwaukee school the upper grades sing the songs and all the children say the prayer every day.

At St. Paul's, Mont., every classroom has a Kateri picture. The older girls in a Tekakwitha Club study her life and sing the songs and learn how to improve their home life.

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Instead of printing a list of the articles used to make Kateri known, we are inserting a folder which tells what they are and their prices. It is named "Romance of Grace."

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