

BULLETIN OF THE  
*Missionary Union of the Clergy*

CATHERINE TEKAKWITHA

RT. REV. MSGR. JOHN F. GLAVIN

On Sunday, September 11, 1932, at Auriesville, N. Y., the site of the Indian village of Ossernenon in which she was born, was held the final session of the Court for the Cause of the Beatification and Canonization of Catherine Tekakwitha, the Lily of the Mohawks. The Most Reverend Edmund F. Gibbons, D.D., Bishop of Albany, placed his episcopal seals on all the documents offered by the court in proof that public worship has not been offered to that holy Indian maiden, and delivered them to the vice-postulator of her cause, the Rev. John J. Wynne, S. J., to be forwarded to the Sacred Congregation of Rites, at Rome. The first documents relating to her reputation for holiness of life were sent to Rome, and are now being examined by the Cardinals. With the two sets of documents before them, it is confidently expected that the Sacred Congregation of Rites will recommend to the Holy Father that Catherine Tekakwitha be declared beatified, the first step in her canonization. When this last is brought about she will be the first American Indian saint.

Catherine Tekakwitha was born in 1656 in the Indian village of Ossernenon, on the south bank of the Mohawk River, about thirty-five miles west of Albany, N. Y. It was then the principal "castle" of the Mohawks, the fiercest of the Iroquois or Five Nations. Here the three Jesuit martyrs, St. Isaac Jogues, St. John DeLalande and St. Rene Goupil had been put to death ten years before Catherine was born. Truly the "blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church," for from their blood has sprung the



Lily of the Mohawks. The site of this Indian village is now the property of the Jesuit Fathers who have erected there a large coliseum and a shrine to Our Lady of the Martyrs. Thousands of pilgrims visit it every year.

### Pagan Father

Catherine's father was a pagan Mohawk; her mother a Christian Algonquin who had been captured in a raid near Three Rivers, Canada. When their child was only four years old the parents and a little brother died of smallpox. Catherine was also a victim of that disease, but survived to remain through life with the usual disfigurement of face and weakness of eyes. She was adopted by her uncle and grew up virtually a slave in his cabin, in a new "castle" about a mile west of Auriesville, to which the Indians moved from plague stricken Ossernenon. This proved too small, and in a few years the Indians crossed to the north bank of the Mohawk and built a well-fortified castle on the hill near the present town of Fonda. This site is now the property of the Diocese of Albany. The new village was called Caughnawaga, meaning "near the rapids." Jesuit missionaries, following in the footsteps of the martyred Jogues, built here their first birch chapel, St. Peter's, and began their work at first chiefly among the Christian captives scattered in three villages along the Mohawk. Gradually the pagans were won to the Faith.

### Baptism of Catherine

Catherine was among the first to receive baptism from Father Jacques de Lamberville, on Easter Sunday, 1676. She was then twenty years old. But her whole life up to that time had been a baptism of fire. She had steadfastly maintained her virginal purity in the midst of a most corrupt people, and had resisted the efforts of her relatives to force her into marriage. The Holy Ghost was working in her soul, and she had already manifested the wonderful holiness of life that drew praise from her pagan companions. Father de Lamberville soon found it advisable to remove her from



her uncle's cabin, where she was now the victim of cruel persecutions, to the Christian village that had been established by the Jesuit missionaries at another Caughnawaga on the south bank of the St. Lawrence River, about twenty miles west of Montreal. This Indian mission was called St. Francis Xavier du Sault. Father de Lamberville had sent a letter to Father Cholenec, the pastor, in which he said:

“Catherine Tekakwitha goes to dwell at the Sault. Will you kindly undertake to direct her? You will soon know what a treasure we have sent you. Guard it well. May it profit in your hands for the glory of God and the salvation of a soul that is certainly very dear to Him.”

### The Mission of St. Francis Xavier

In this Catholic colony, Catherine spent the remaining three and a half years of her life. She rejoiced to be able to practise her religion in peace. She joined in all the religious services with great fervor and soon surpassed all in the practice of heroic virtues. Her great devotions were to the Blessed Sacrament, to the Cross and to Our Lady. She would spend hours in the chapel close to the altar, hearing all the Masses and visiting the Blessed Sacrament five times every day. All her extreme mortifications were offered to Jesus Crucified for sin. She bound herself to her Divine Spouse by a vow of perpetual virginity — the first among the Indians — and made the vow publicly in the chapel on the feast of Our Lady's Annunciation, March 25, 1679, a year before her death.

That last year was spent in increased mortifications and prayers. The Indians were naturally given to great bodily mortifications. Catherine burned her legs with live coals, wore an iron girdle around her waist, slept on thorns, endured long fasts and walked barefooted through the snow. However, she was ever obedient to her confessor, and ceased her extreme mortifications when ordered by him to do so.

Catherine died on Tuesday of Holy Week, April 17, 1680. She had received all the Sacraments. Her last words were: “Jesus, I love You.” Immediately after her death her



countenance changed. Her face, deeply pitted from the childhood smallpox, and much emaciated by her rigorous fasts, was suddenly transfigured by a supernatural beauty. Father Cholenec, who was kneeling beside the body, was the first to notice it, and called another priest to see it. All the Indians gathered to look upon her whom they regarded as a saint. Contrary to the usual Indian mode of burying, her body was placed in a coffin made by two Frenchmen. The funeral was held on Holy Thursday afternoon. One of the priests wanted her buried in the chapel because of her great holiness, but the other said she should be buried in the spot she herself had indicated, at the foot of the tall cross in the cemetery. This was done. Some years later, when the Mission was moved a few miles further west, the body was taken up and buried in the ground in the new chapel. Another migration took place to the present site of the village of Caughnawaga, and the bones placed in a box in the sacristy. Yielding to the many requests, the skull and the bones of the upper body were sent to convents and other Indian reservations. The remaining bones are now in a neat box, protected by the seals of the Archbishop of Montreal, and are kept in a fire-proof vault.

But the place of her first burial has always been held sacred by the Indians. The tall cross has been replaced several times, the last time in 1890 when the Rev. Clarence A. Walworth of Albany also erected a granite monument over the grave, with the inscription:

*Kateri Tekakwitha*

*April 17, 1680*

*"The fairest flower that ever bloomed among true men."*

### Miracles

Catherine Tekakwitha lived on this earth twenty-four years — the same length of time as St. Teresa, the Little Flower of Jesus. Unlike the Little Flower, who had a background of Catholicity, a Christian home and a very religious childhood, Catherine had none of these, but their



very opposite. From a pagan village and most degraded surroundings, Catherine bloomed like a lily in the purity of her life and the spiritual beauty of her soul.

Like the Little Flower, she, too, sent down a "shower of roses" after her death in the hundreds of miracles, duly recorded by her biographers, the two priests who were with her when she died, Fathers Cholenec and Chauchetierre. To these priests and to her great friend, Anastasia, she appeared at different times surrounded with her glory. She directed Father Chauchetierre to paint pictures of her, and these pictures together with the things she had used, her crucifix and shawl, and even earth from her tomb produced wonderful cures.

Her reputation has not died out with the political changes in Canada. In 1884 the Fathers of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore petitioned the Holy See for her beatification with that of the Jesuit Martyrs. But it was thought best to separate them and to finish the Cause of the Martyrs before taking up that of Catherine. On June 1, 1931, Bishop Gibbons was authorized by Rome to form a court to hear and weigh the testimony in her case. A year was spent in gathering the evidence and in examining many witnesses. That evidence was forwarded to Rome in June, 1932. The next step was then begun. The court examined other witnesses and visited and inspected the remains at Caughnawaga and her tomb. The documents in this case have now been sent to Rome.

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The apostle, the missionary, is another Christ, who goes from one country to another preaching His gospel; he is another Christ, who carries the Cross upon his shoulders through the highways and byways of the world; he is another Christ, who goes about moistening with his blood the soil of the earth; he is another Christ, who goes in search of all the sheep to lead them into the fold of His Church.