

Call to Caughnawaga

Caughnawaga is one of the quietest little villages in Quebec Province. Hugging the south shore of the St. Lawrence River between Lake St. Louis and the Lachine Rapids, it seems to defy the hustle and bustle of the great city of Montreal, whose suburbs extend for twenty-five miles along the north shore of the river.

But Caughnawaga hides behind its unpretentious exterior all the richness and the glory of almost three centuries of leadership as a stronghold of Christianity among the Indians of North America. Governors and Commanders, even Kings and Emperors, appealed to the influence and the power that the Caughnawaga braves exercised over their pagan brethren in times of war and political unrest.

The glory of Caughnawaga, however, lies not in any form of human achievement. All the great exploits of the village braves were pushed into a background of oblivion by the accomplishments of a bashful, retiring young maiden who died at the age of twenty-four. Katherine Tekakwitha, the "Lily of the Mohawks," is the glory of Caughnawaga.

Kateri, as she was known to her Indian brethren, lived for four years in the mission of St. Francis Xavier. The first location of the mission was a few miles farther down the river. In the course of its three centuries of vigorous activity it moved five times, the present location being seven or eight miles from the original. In St. Francis Xavier Church in Caughnawaga today there are pictures, candlesticks, altar accessories, and rare documents dating back to the foundation of the mission.

Kateri's life, based on the evidence of Father Peter Cholenec, S.J., Confessor to the young Indian convert, is the story behind the "Call to Caughnawaga." Her virtues have already been pronounced heroic by Pope Pius XII, who is showing a keen personal interest in the progress of the cause. Thousands of her clients, particularly in Canada and the United States, are cherishing the fond hope that 1956, the tercentenary of her birth, will see her raised to the altars.

During the ten years immediately following Kateri's death there was a literal deluge of miracles. Mere contact with objects used by her—a blanket, a bowl, a crucifix, even a bit of earth from her grave—worked instantaneous cures. A missionary in a nearby village stated that there were no sick left in his mission as a result of the intervention of the "Lily of the Mohawks."

In her day the young Mohawk maiden lived in an atmosphere of Christian fervor which, according to the missionaries, suggested the spirit of the early Christians. Though just recently instructed and converted from paganism, these descendants of fierce and merciless tribes seem to penetrate the very soul of Christianity. They set an admirable example of prayer and above all of that much-neglected energizing element of the Christian life—penance. In spite of the frailty of her body Kateri outdid them all in the practice of self-denial and, above all, in her life of prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

Kateri's name is becoming familiar to many and her reputation as a powerful intercessor is spreading rapidly throughout America. Whether or not 1956 will see her raised to the altars depends upon the faith and the confidence of an ever-increasing number of clients whose combined prayers God will surely answer.

Various Catholic Action organizations in Canada and the United States are including the promoting of Kateri's cause among their Apostolic projects. The Holy Name Societies of the Archdiocese of Montreal held their fall quarterly meeting at Caughnawaga this year. The delegates were addressed by Fathr H. Bechard, S.J., postulator for the cause of canonization. As a result, many of the parishes on the Island of Montreal are benefiting by the acquaintance which the Holy Name men established with Blessed Katherine Tekakwitha.

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