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Maryknoll



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OUR COVER STORY

Kateri Tekakwitha

TEN YEARS after Saint Isaac Jogues was martyred, at Auriesville, New York, Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680) was born there. Daughter of a Mohawk father and an Algonquin Christian mother, she lived a saintly life that earned her the title, "Lily of the Mohawks."

Kateri lost her parents at an early age, and was adopted by an uncle, a respected Mohawk chieftain. She was a thoughtful, industrious child, naturally modest, reserved, gentle, and eager to assist others. She grew to young womanhood as a pagan in a completely pagan village. Still, she did not take to pagan ways. The barbarous tortures inflicted on captives by her tribesmen filled her with horror and repugnance. Also, much to her uncle's extreme displeasure, she firmly refused marriage with a young Indian brave.

When Kateri was eleven, Jesuit missionaries came again among the Mohawks. Then, once more, Christians in the village could practice their religion. Kateri learned about the Catholic Faith from her friends. She was baptized on Easter Sunday, 1676, when she was twenty years old, and took the name Kateri (Indian for Catherine).

To avoid a forced marriage, Kateri made her way to a Christian settlement that the Jesuits had founded in Canada, in sight of Montreal. There she lived with a devout Catholic family. She spent most of her time in prayer and works of charity. In 1679, with permission of her pastor, she made a vow of virginity.

During that period, Kateri spent many hours of every day in the woods, praying. On this month's cover, artist Joseph Watson Little depicts her as the friend of all woodland animals.

Although little is known of Kateri's spiritual life, one point does stand out. In a village where everyone was a Christian, people spoke of her as *the* Christian. Also, many Indians liked to kneel near her in chapel, because they believed that she made them pray more fervently.

Kateri died at the age of twenty-four, in the Christian Indian settlement on the south bank of the St. Lawrence River, in Canada. There her remains are carefully preserved, in the hope that eventually she will be canonized. Upon her tomb are inscribed these words: "Fairest flower that ever bloomed among true men." ■■