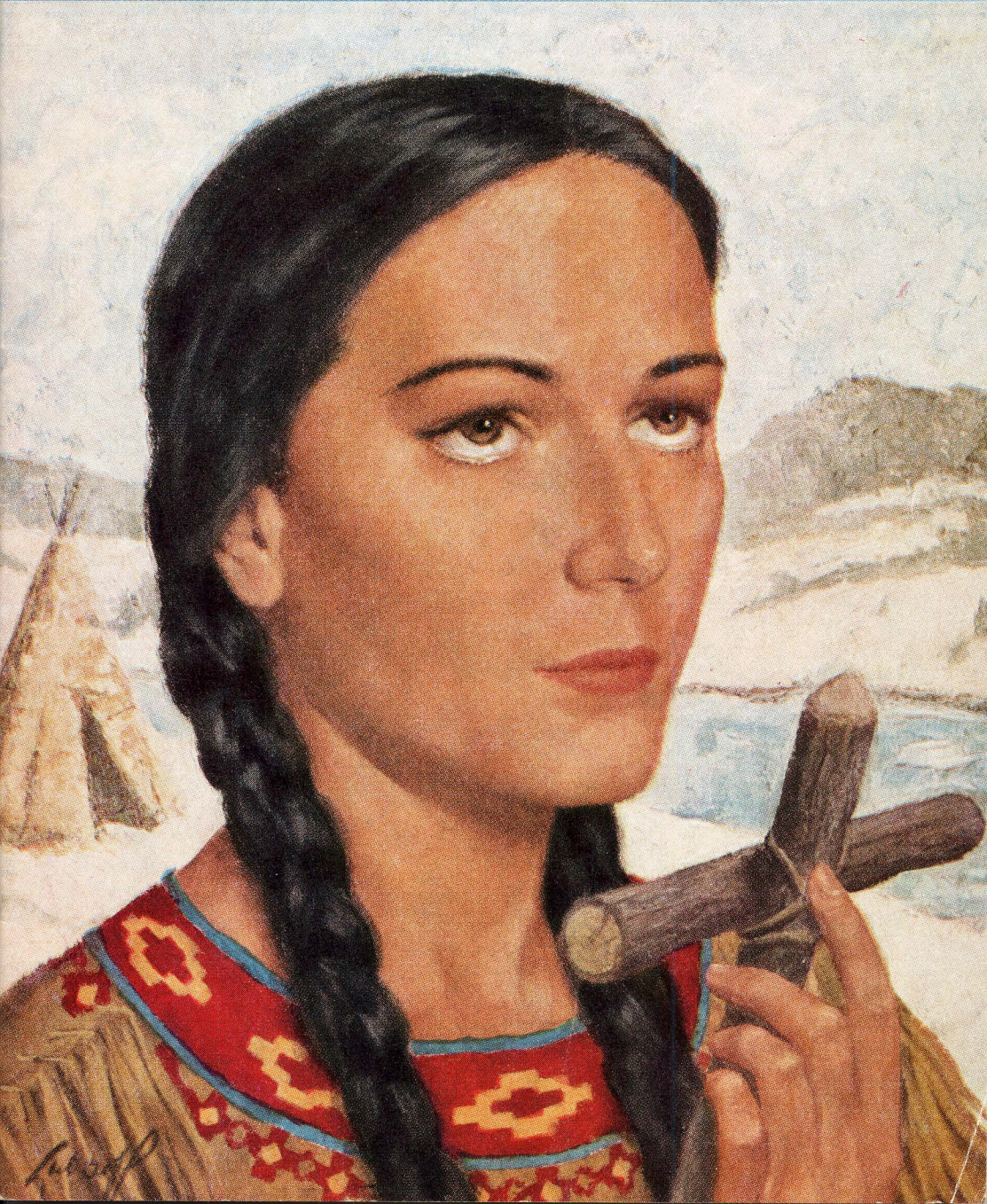


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Sacred Heart MESSENGER

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INDIAN VIRGIN

By THOMAS J. COFFEY, S.J.



On a natural altar-stone Kateri Tekakwitha pronounced her vow of perpetual virginity.

North American scene.

Any way you look at it, the Mohawk maiden was a marvel. Pope Pius XI remarked of her: "Her life is a miracle." Her bronze image is there for all to see emblazoned on the majestic main portals of St. Patrick's Cathedral on New York's Fifth Avenue. She has happily hurdled fifteen out of twenty canonical obstacles in the way of her Beatification.

How is her Cause progressing? The late Archbishop Edwin O'Hara asked the Holy Father, with understandable impatience, how long the process of Canonization of St. Pope Pius X would take. Pius XII said: "The answer is prayer. Prayer will bring miracles. Miracles will bring the approbation of the Church." The matter of purported miracles is presently being explored in the case of Kateri. It will be the business of Holy Mother Church to make the decision. If and when she is beatified, she will be,

says Father Antonelli, O.F.M., relator-general of her Cause, "a North American Indian, a genuine 'redskin'—the first of that great and sorely tried human family to be presented to the Sacred Congregation of Rites as a candidate for the honors of the altar."

Candidates for Beatification have to possess an outstanding number of qualifications, and satisfy the scrutiny of an eminent, ascetic, but none the less eagle-

eyed "Devil's Advocate." There is no mere passing mark. One must be A-1 in every subject to qualify.

Kateri's life, at first sight, would seem to be dull, dry, humdrum, and undramatic. She gathered faggots, colored skins red with sturgeon's glue, cooked succotash, soaked porcupine quills for her embroidering. She said her prayers, did plenty of penance and much more of practical charity. "She was as good as a well-bred French girl," said Anastasia, friend of her mother's, "and she was happy and witty." Waiting at the trickling spring for water, she made the others laugh. At least once a band of young braves homeward bound from Sacandaga came in view, ready to lay their catch of beaver pelts at some willing maiden's feet. When the others bantered Tekakwitha about this, she scooted with her jug up the hill to her uncle's cabin.

How could she ever, three centuries later, face up to the alarming requirements basic to all Causes for Canonization? We know for a fact that she did. Look in on this remarkable scene at Rome less than twenty years ago. The formidable Sacred Congregation of Rites assembled in the Vatican before His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, seated on the papal throne. The Most Reverend Cardinal Relator rose before the scarlet assemblage to propose a question:

"Has it been proved in this instance [the case of Tekakwitha] that the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, Love of God and neighbor, and the cardinal virtues—Prudence, Justice, Temperance, Fortitude and their subordinates—were of heroic degree?"

Papal Declaration

The following January, 1943, after repeated prayers for light, and after all the minutely attested documents amassed over three hundred years were in, His Holiness before an equally majestic assemblage solemnly proclaimed:

"It has been proved that the virtues of Tekakwitha were heroic!"

We might be surprised here. Her faith—that we can understand, perhaps—her love, her hope. But heroic or *super*-man-sized fortitude? That would seem to be the most recognizable stamp of a martyr, or of a brave man with brawn to back him. We look for it in the lives of Jogues, Goupil and Lalande, the glorious three who died at Ossernenon, a decade before Kateri's birth and blossoming there. But in frail, pockmarked Tekakwitha, how?

We have only to "look at the record."

Consecration

When the terrible smallpox epidemic which swept through Ossernenon in 1659-60 had spent its evil breath, Kahenta her mother, Kenhoronkwa her father and Otsikehta her baby brother were cold in death. Kateri was on her own, an unprotected orphan. In the long-house to which she was assigned for care nearly every Mohawk brave and woman hated the "Prayer," as the Christian life was then

Ecumenism

Ecumenism is
Not just
Evanston, nor
Delhi, nor all
The big councils,
Nor just friendlily
Greeting Pope
John. Ecumenism
Is very much
More. It's the
Gathering in
One; it's the
Whole Christ,
The whole Church.

It's the grains
Of God's wheat
For the Bread
That is He.
It's the myriad
Grapes of the
Vine for the
Wine of his Blood
Oned to the
Feeding his
Multitude, athirst
And ahunger
For truth, for justice,
For love.

Pax

called. Yet, after her Baptism, in spite of cajolery, force, subterfuge, downright violence and wicked suggestion, she refused to be forced or frightened into marriage, the customary vocation—not because it was at all unworthy, but because she was moved to consecrate her virginity to God at the age of twenty. To most of the Mohawks, young and old, who blindly bent to every whim or promise of the senses, such a thing (with some edifying exceptions) "just wasn't done."

VENERABLE" IS AN ODD label for a twenty-four-year-old Mohawk-Algonquin maiden to be saddled with, until you catch the idea of the author of the Book of Wisdom, who says: "The *understanding* of man is old age, and a *spotless life* is gray hairs." It is the title earned by Kateri Tekakwitha, along with the magnificent Mother Seton and the illustrious Bishop Neumann, to mention but three of the candidates for the altar on the present