

KEY

TO HAPPINESS

1980 JUNE



Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha

The Lily of the Mohawks

Clementine Lenta

Tekakwitha, an Indian princess, paid quite a price in becoming a Catholic. She was often pelted with stones as she went to and from the mission church to attend holy Mass. And on Sundays, since she refused to work in the fields as her relatives did, no food was given to her. Her absence from the Indians' pagan celebrations and her refusal to marry brought frequent ridicule, harassment, and cruelties. In spite of such persecutions, Tekakwitha remained steadfast in her love of God and the teachings of His Church — to such a degree that she is now honored as the Lily of the Mohawks and will be solemnly beatified by Pope John Paul II in Rome on Sunday, June 22.

Tekakwitha was born in 1656 at Ossernenon, near Auriesville, New York where St. Isaac Jogues and his companions were martyred. Her father was a pagan, a chief of the Mohawks. Her mother, an Algonquin Indian, was a Christian. When she was four years old, smallpox swept through the village. Her father, mother, and brother died during the epidemic. Tekakwitha recovered but her vision was al-

most destroyed, her health remained frail and her face was terribly pock-marked. Her uncle, Chief Iowerano, claimed the child as his daughter and she was taught to sew and to work in the cornfields.

When Tekakwitha was eighteen, Jesuit missionaries came to her village and to the surrounding area. She listened eagerly to their preaching and her interest and zeal brought rapid knowledge in the Faith. She was baptized on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1676 by Father Jaques de Lamberville, S.J., in St. Peter's mission church at Fonda. She was given the name, Kateri (Catherine).

As time went by Kateri's love of the Mass, of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and of the Blessed Virgin intensified and she often undertook frequent and rigorous penances. But her practice of the Faith continued to cause her much suffering.

Since the Chief and many of her relatives did not become Christians, they resented the time that she spent in prayers and her constant refusal to marry and so their cruelties toward Kateri continued.

Father de Lamberville realized the dangers of Kateri's condition and urged her to leave her tribe. And so, ill and half-blind, she walked 200 miles to the Christian village of Caughnawaga. Two Christian braves accompanied her and protected her during the perilous flight. She arrived at Caughnawaga in the autumn of 1677, and was welcomed by Father Cholenec of the Jesuit mission. She gave the priest a letter from Father de Lamberville which said: "Will you kindly direct Kateri? You will soon find out what a jewel we have sent you. Guard it well."

Father Cholenec instructed Kateri and trained her as a catechist. She continued to advance in the spiritual life and on the feast of the Annunciation, 1679, she made her vow of virginity.

Kateri's health declined even more and after a long illness, she died on Wednesday of Holy Week, April 17, 1680. Immediately, her appearance changed from a suffering, pock-marked countenance to a radiant, petal-smooth, beautiful face — an extraordinary happening.



During the Iroquois persecution of Christian Hurons, an Indian girl named Theresa was taken captive and her rosary snatched away from her. Her devotion to the rosary was so great and her love so steadfast that she made a rosary by placing field stones in a circle on the ground. Like Kateri, Theresa was determined to maintain inviolate the integrity and sanctity of her newly-found Faith amid intolerable circumstances. And the holy rosary was their greatest and continuing inspiration.



Air view of the National Shrine of the North American Martyrs at Auriesville, New York. About a decade after the martyrdom of St. Isaac Jogues and Companions in this area, Kateri Tekakwitha, the Lily of the Mohawks, was born here in 1656. On June 22 of this year, Kateri will be beatified by Pope John Paul II, the final step in the process leading to canonization as a saint. The first native American to be so honored by the Church is accorded special veneration at this Martyrs' Shrine, constructed with a seating capacity for 6,500 persons. Catholics all over America join the mighty throng of pilgrims in praising and thanking God for the unique blessings coming to all through the saintly Lily of the Mohawks.

The Indians and others showed their veneration by praying to Kateri from the day of her death. The fame of her holiness and of the many cures and remarkable favors attributed to her intercession spread rapidly. She was declared Venerable by Pope Pius XII on January 3, 1943.

Soon after her death the *Tekakwitha League* was founded to cherish Kateri's memory, to inspire imitation of her virtues, and to invoke her intercessions. It still exists through the National Kateri

Center, directed by the Rev. Joseph S. McBride, S.J., the Vice Postulator for her beatification. The Center, from which blessed medals, books, pamphlets and a play may be obtained, is located at Auriesville, New York 12016. Special devotions are often held there.

The Indians call Kateri "the fairest flower that ever bloomed among Redmen." And many people from around the world honor and love her as the *Lily of the Mohawks*. —†