





# Lily of the Mohawks



Three Canadians were beatified by Pope John Paul II, June 22, 1980. One of the three was Kateri Tekakwitha, a young Indian girl who lived and died near Montreal.

Her mother was a Christian Algonquin woman brought to what is now New York State from the vicinity of Trois Rivières during tribal wars. A victorious Mohawk chief married her.

Kateri was born in 1656 at Ossernenon. She was barely 4 years old when her parents died of smallpox. She herself recovered but never ceased to suffer from serious complications of the disease.

After her parents' death Kateri was adopted by her parental uncle. The child appeared industrious, gentle and serious, far beyond her tender age. She rarely left the hut she lived in as her damaged eyes could not stand the brightness of the sunlight. Spiritually, she matured with astonishing rapidity and seemed to have made an irrevocable choice of her way to God. Confronted with her aunt's matchmaking and a possibility of marriage, she undertook the unprecedented step of running away and staying in the woods until the marriage plans were abandoned.

Her first exposure to Christian teaching took place in 1666 when some Jesuit missionaries visited the village and stayed a few days in her uncle's hut. She listened most attentively to what they said - but it was only 10 years later that Fr. de Lamberville, S.J., discovered her spiritual beauty and eventually baptized her on Easter Sunday, 1676. Very soon her attitude of total dedication to God awakened the hostile passion of the villagers that led to open persecution. Kateri faced this harsh reality with one weapon: PRAYER. She prayed all the time. In prayer she found strength, perseverance, patience and gentleness.

Eventually she and a few other Christians fled to Canada. Despite her uncle's hot pursuit, the fugitives succeeded and reached their destination: La Prairie de la Madeleine. Here, on the shores of the St. Lawrence, Kateri's prayer attained the peak and filled her whole person and her whole life. Here she took a vow of perpetual chastity. Here her soaring flight to God knew no obstacles and was marked only by physical suffering due to her failing health and severe self-imposed penance. The villagers said that she could always be found, either in her little hut working for others, or adoring the Blessed Sacrament. She died during the Holy Week, April 17, 1680. She was barely 24 years old.

According to an eye-witness who was her first biographer, her face became clear and radiant within minutes after her death. All traces, left by the disease, disappeared. Her body seemed to reflect a beauty of her soul, united with Eternal Beauty and Light. Her transformation after death was followed by unusual happenings: healings both of bodies and souls, answered prayers and motherly love derived from her people.

The mortal remains of Kateri, originally kept in a small wooden chest, were moved three or four times along with the Mission of St. Francis Xavier church. Finally, they were laid to rest in the Mission church built in 1845 at Caughnawaga. A new Carrara marble tomb, containing these precious relics, was solemnly blessed by Bishop Gérard-Marie Coderre on December 17, 1972. The epitaph reads: "KAIATANORON KATERI TEKAKWITHA, Iroquois for 'Venerable Kateri Tekawitha', 1656-1680". On the left hand side, a stylized turtle recalls that she was a member of the Turtle Clan; on the right hand side, a stylized lily indicates that she is now known as the "Lily of the Mohawks".

The inscription on her cenotaph, under a large Cross, in the area presently known as Côte St. Catherine, bears witness to the touching love of her people: "ONKWEONWEKE KATSITST-IO TEOTSITSIANEKARON" - *"The loveliest flower that blossomed among Indians"*.

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My "friendship with Kateri Tekakwitha has been of a long standing. I visited her shrine in Caughnawaga nearly 30 years ago. I was immediately fascinated by this unusual and lovable Indian girl. Her life of prayer, her unwavering perseverance and love - in the circumstances of minimal exposure to Christian influence - were so convincing that I nev-

# Kateri

She was  
like a wild flower,  
hidden in the green shade  
of ferns.  
An Indian maid,  
called Lily  
by her people,  
Kateri Tekakwitha.

She fled  
from the joyous fate  
of youthful hearts.  
And the forest was  
her faithful haven.  
No trail betrayed  
her light footsteps.  
No creature gave away  
her wildly beating heart.  
She heard no endless  
questions - why...

Who ever asks bluebells  
why so brilliant is  
their blue?  
Who ever fathomed  
the ultimate meaning  
of the ways of God?  
Facing the Light  
she responded to the Call  
and ran to meet her Lord.

Trails of human wandering...  
Trails of life.  
A pattern that never  
repeats itself,  
designed in the mind of God.  
Like man - unique.  
Like man - appearing only once  
on earth.

A gift for ever.  
Given only once.  
Man follows his path to God,  
to a point where  
all the paths converge.  
And meets his Lord  
in the dazzling Light  
of vision face to face.

She's gone.  
And gone are the nights  
spend in the wilderness,  
years of humiliation and toil,  
struggles and suffering  
accepted willingly.  
The solitude of searching God  
in the mature obedience  
to his will.



*Wojanicko*

But her trail  
of ethereal beauty  
and indomitable will  
has remained  
for ever present  
in the night-darkness  
of the woods,  
shimmering white of trillium clumps  
vast starlit skies,  
luminous pale green  
northern lights.  
In the silence  
suddenly torn asunder  
by the haunting laughter  
of the loon.