KAZDY KATOLIK JEST MISJONARZEM Blog Maria Teresa Ledóchowska



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OCCASIONAL

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Who are we?

St. Hyacinth Mission Fund is a committee established in Ottawa, in 1974, to help needy people in the Third World through missionaries. The committee partially supports three missions in Africa (Burundi, Cameroon and Madagascar) and one mission in India (Social and Leprosy Rehabilitation Centre, Jeevodaya). In order to keep in touch with the donors and to increase mission awarness the committee publishes a quarterly bulletin in Polish - "Z Pomoca" ("With Aid").



In June of this year, we had a special reason to participate in a ceremony of great happiness and joy as opposed to one of human misery. On June 22nd, Kateri Tekakwitha, a native Indian girl from Canada and known to the people in Poland, was proclaimed "Blessed". She is the first such Indian to be beatified and, on this occasion, a special poem, dedicated to Kateri, was published in this bulletin. It was presented by Mr. Matthew R.W. Dale, the Papal Chamberlain from Ottawa, to the Holy Father after the beatification ceremonies. The poem was originally written in Polish. So that we may share our joy with our Indian and other Canadian brethren this special issue contains the Kateri poem in its English translation.

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. Spriritually, 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 unprecendented 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 mission-aries 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 strenght, perseverance, patience and gentleness.

Eventually she and a few other Christians fled to Canada. Despite her uncle's hot pursuit, the futigives 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-withess 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.



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.