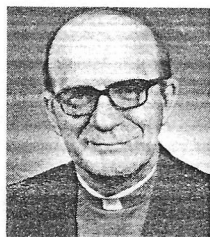


ANOTHER KATERI RELIC¹

AT THE BISHOP'S RESIDENCE in Chicoutimi, P.Q., a discovery was recently made that might be the occasion in this part of the country of renewing devotion to Kateri Tekakwitha, the young Amerindian from Caughnawaga who died at that Mission in April 1680, at the age of twenty-four, and whom the Church declared Blessed in 1980.

As a matter of fact, Father Jean-Philippe Blackburn, archivist at the Bishopric in Chicoutimi, found a fine relic of Blessed Kateri in a section of the archives reserved for many years to old and new relics. This lucky find is all the more important as, according to Father Henri Béchar, S.J., Vice-Postulator in Canada for the Cause of Kateri, relics made out of the remains of the Beata are scarce, with the exceptions of those conserved and venerated in the church of St. Francis Xavier at Kahnawake.



Fr. J. P. Blackburn

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

Born in 1656, of an Algonquin Christian and of a Mohawk brave from Ossernenon, today Auriesville, N.Y., orphaned in 1660, christened in 1676, Kateri Tekakwitha was obliged to take refuge during the autumn of 1677 at the Mission of St. Francis Xavier established on the south shore of the St. Lawrence, opposite Montreal. There she died on Wednesday of Holy Week, April 17, 1680, and her body was laid to rest in the Mission cemetery. Thus it was that this spot was called **Kateri tsi thaiatat**, "the place where Kateri was buried."

From 1680 to today, the relics of Blessed Kateri have been moved about many times and they were subject to severe experiences. It is not surprising then that they are rare and much sought after.



Fr. J. Bouchard

In July 1676, the Iroquois Mission of Laprairie moved five quarters of a league higher up the St. Lawrence, near the Portage river. A chapel was immediately erected which was overthrown by a windblast in 1683. A new chapel was quickly built in 1684 and were interred in it Kateri's remains, which had been buried in the mission cemetery four years earlier. The translation of these

1. The original text of this article minus the last twenty-four lines appeared in the **Progrès-Dimanche** weekly, May 3, 1981 edition, on page 115. The author, Father Jacques Bouchard, Director of the Office of Social and Diocesan Communications of Chicoutimi, wrote it at the suggestion and with the collaboration of Father Jean-Philippe Blackburn, archivist at the Bishop's residence in Chicoutimi.

relics took place at night so as to avoid any appearance of a public cult.

Following a common agreement with the religious and civil authorities, the site of the Mission of St. Francis Xavier was once again removed. The village begun in 1716 was located at Caughnawaga (Kahnawake: at-the-rapids, at-the-Sault), and is still in existence. For a long time, the Mission was called Sault St. Louis. From 1717 to 1719 the construction of a residence for the missionaries and for a parish church was effected. The relics of the future Blessed were placed at times within the church and at other times within the residence of the missionaries.

It is worthy of mention that in 1756, some of Kateri's relics, among them the skull, were handed over to the Mission of St. Francis Regis (today St. Regis, P.Q., situated in the territory of the diocese of Valleyfield). This mission had been founded during the previous year by the Jesuit Fathers for a certain number of families of the faithful from the Mission of St. Francis Xavier of Caughnawaga. Unfortunately, many years ago, a fire destroyed the St. Regis church and at the same time the precious relics it contained.

Finally on November 1, 1972, Blessed Kateri's relics which had been temporarily preserved at the residence of the Jesuits of Caughnawaga, were solemnly laid to rest in a tomb within the interior of the mission church.

DISCOVERY OF RELIC AT BISHOP'S RESIDENCE

The relic discovered at the Bishop's residence in Chicoutimi, is 6.4 cm in length and 3.8 cm in breadth and seems to have been the foresection of the sternum. This opinion, may I add, was confirmed by Dr. Dominique Gaudry, who was the general practitioner at the Hotel Dieu St. Vallier of Chicoutimi from 1935 to 1952 and who examined this part of the bone.

On the envelope containing the relic, are to be found these words written by Canon F.-X. Eugène Frenette, archivist at the Bishopric of Chicoutimi from 1893 to 1943: **Relic of Catherine Tekakwitha, Iroquois.** Within the envelope, you have the following identification: "Picture and relic of the Iroquois Maiden Catherine Tekakwitha, who died in the odor of holiness at the village of Sault St. Louis, P.Q., on April 17, 1680. Given by Rev. Father V. Burtin, miss., O.M.I."

Father Nicholas Victor Burtin, Oblate of Mary Immaculate, just mentioned, was born in France in 1828 and carried on his ministry in Canada, particularly at Caughnawaga, as a missionary (1855-1856), then as assistant (1859-1864) and as Pastor (1864-1892). Father Burtin, who died in 1902, was also the author of a **Life of Catherine Tekakwitha** written in 1894.

How was it then that this special relic of Blessed Kateri was offered to Bishop Dominique Racine? To begin with, the first Bishop of Chicoutimi was a native of the parish of St. Ambrose of Jeune-Lorette (Loretteville) whose origin, as well as that of Ancienne-Lorette, was the same as that of the Huron Mission of Lorette (1676). Even today, the Hurons privileged with the presence of missionaries, have a church and a parish organization of their own. Having grown up in this environment and in this entourage, it is easy to understand the interest that he bore to the one who was called the Lily of the Mohawks, and whose reputation of holiness was widespread among the different Amerindian tribes. Following the episcopal consecration of Bishop Dominique Racine in 1878, the chief of the Hurons had on that occasion, as they celebrated him at Jeune-Lorette, expressed the affection of the Huron nation for him. Furthermore, Bishop Racine had many Amerindian families in his diocese, whom he was very fond of.

No need to look far afield to find the reasons that, in 1885, incited Bishop Dominique Racine and his brother Bishop Antoine, the first Bishop of Sherbrooke, to ask the Pope to introduce the Cause of Canonization of Kateri. One must also recognize that these two Bishops, founders of dioceses, were well inspired to commend all the inhabitants of Canada to the one whom they affectionately called "The Protectress of New France."

The discovery of this relic of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha calls to our attention some very beautiful pages of history. But better still, it is an invitation to discover the signification for each and every one of us of the meaning of her life. As John Paul II noted on the occasion of her beatification, "She manifested a spirit of solidarity with her people by accepting the tasks that were hers within Indian society. She refused however to let her life be determined for her by the morals of her time. She freely chose to become a Christian and to live in accordance with her baptism." (**Message to the Faithful of the Diocese of Saint-Jean-de-Québec**).

Furthermore, let us hope, with Bishop Jean-Guy Couture and with Father Henri Béchar, Vice-Postulator for her Cause of Canonization, that the Diocese of Chicoutimi shall continue to take interest in this young Amerindian and participate in the different initiatives for the hastening of her Canonization.

FR. JACQUES BOUCHARD