

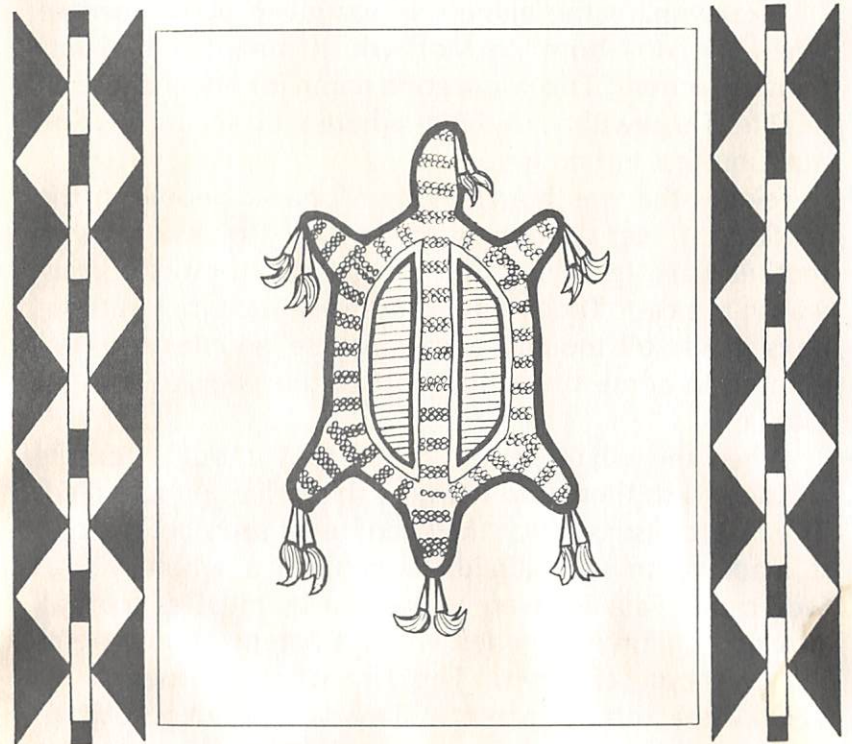
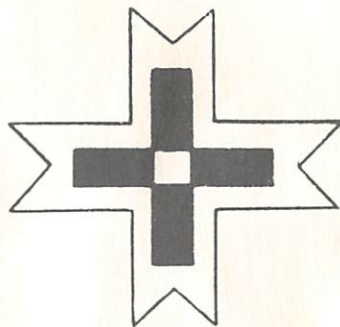
KATERI TEKAKWITHA

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Ron Zeilinger, St. Joseph's Indian School, Chamberlain, SD 57629

A Prayer in Honor of Kateri Tekakwitha:

Great Spirit!
Our Father!
We remember our sister Kateri.
She was one of us — the people of this land,
this earth.
It was You who led her to the woods
and taught her the lessons of the cross.
It was You who comforted her and strengthened her
along the sacred path with your food.
Lead us to your love,
feed and strengthen us along your sacred way.
Show us the way of Jesus, the way of Kateri,
may it be our way as well!
Amen!



The young woman whom God gave to us for our inspiration and guidance, Kateri Tekakwitha, was a member of the TURTLE clan of the Iroquois tribe. The turtle has long been a symbol of fertility and motherhood among the Native Americans and this symbol may be applied to a young woman such as Kateri even though she never married and had children in her lifetime, for she now has many children in her devoted followers. Among the Lakota, a baby's umbilical cord is kept in a small, beaded, leather turtle and given to the child to keep as a reminder of their day of birth and their origins. Like Kateri, we are baptized and now have our origins in God, the loving Spirit who creates us anew and gives us life within us rising up like a lively stream of life-giving water.

Kateri Tekakwitha: Her Life

Tekakwitha is the name she was given by her people when she was born. In Mohawk, it means: "She puts things in order." This was a good name for her because all her life, Tekakwitha put things where they should be. She put God first in her life.

Tekakwitha was born among Mohawk people in the Turtle clan. Her father was a full-blood Mohawk and her mother was Algonquin. The village that she was born in was in the east. Today it is called New York, but in those days it was all Indian country. White people were beginning to come there but most of the people were Indian.

When the white people came, they brought terrible sickness with them and many of the Indian people died. They were diseases that they had never seen before, and it made them very afraid. Sometimes a whole village would die. Families were wiped out by measles or small pox and children were left without parents, and parents left without children. This is what happened to Tekakwitha and her parents. They died of sickness when she was very little and she was adopted by her uncle. She was only four years old and very lonely. Her uncle needed a daughter and so he took her into his longhouse to stay.

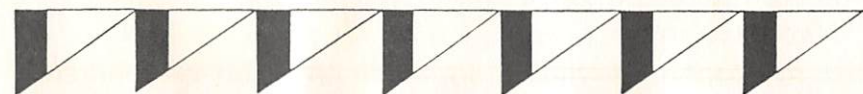
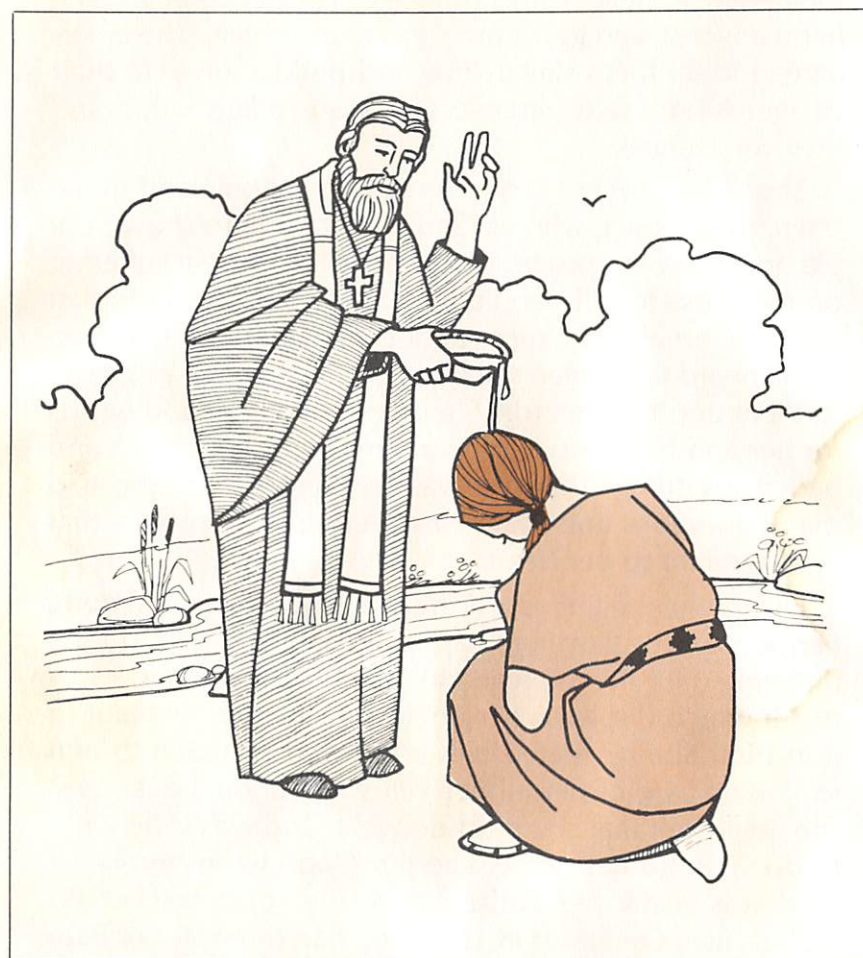
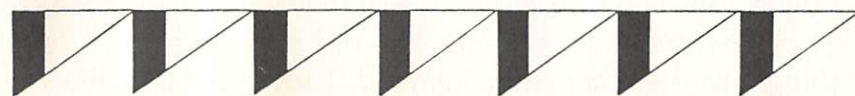
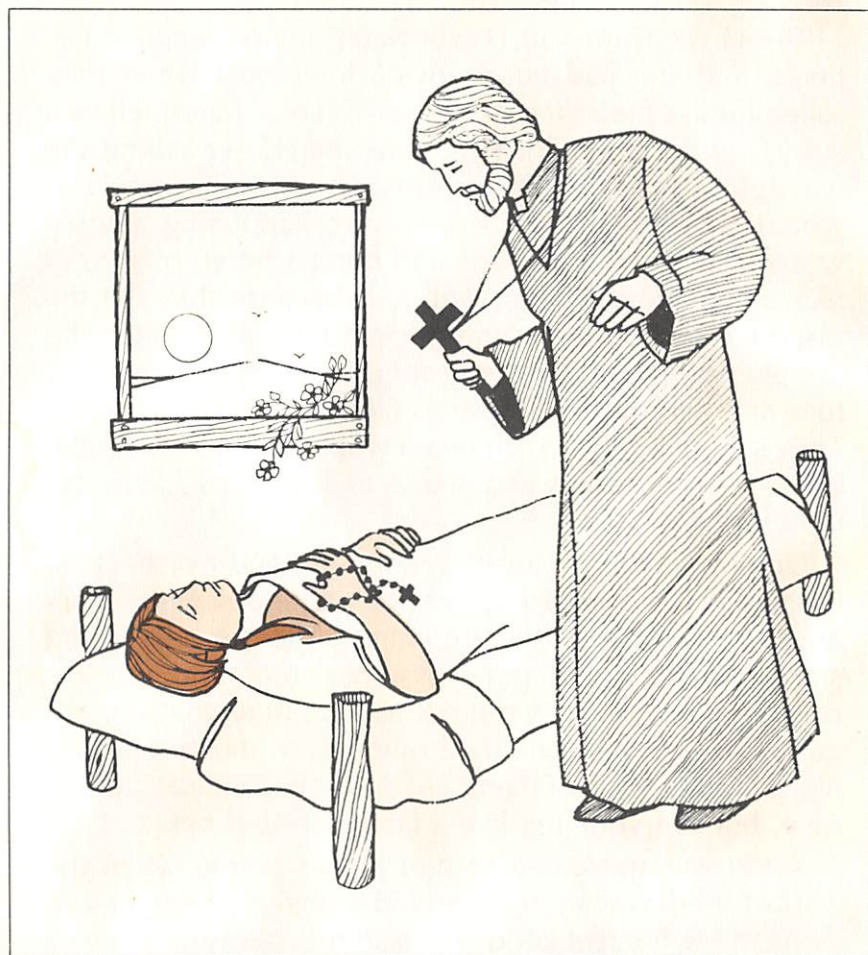
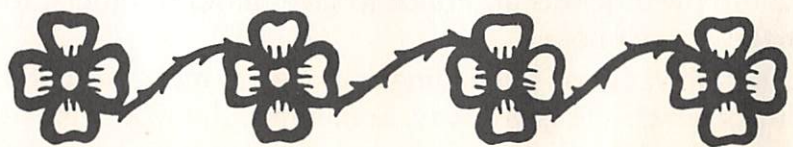
Her uncle took good care of her, but she was little and weak. She had marks all over her skin because she had small pox, too. She had been very sick but did not die. Sometimes her eyes could not stand the sunlight, or were blurry because of the disease. But she tried to work hard around the longhouse getting water, cooking corn meal, getting firewood. Along with all the other women she went to the fields to plant and hoe the corn. In the fall, she helped pick the corn and put it away for the winter. It was hard work, but all her life, Tekakwitha wasn't afraid to work hard to help others. Working hard so that everyone could stay alive was a traditional Indian value and she believed in it. Her people came first.

One day, some strange white men came to visit the

But she was ancient in wisdom. By the life God had called her to live, she had shown all peoples everywhere that the Indian people are a deeply spiritual people. The Gospel belongs to all people and cultures. Wherever its sun shines, flowers spring up out of the native earth to praise it.

After Kateri Tekakwitha was dead, those who were with her noticed a change in her. The skin on her face that had been full of scars and marks from small pox looked smooth and fresh. Everyone knew from this sign that God had always loved Kateri very much and was letting others know it. The words that the mother of Jesus said once could be about Kateri as well:

"God has looked on my lowliness
and from now on, all nations
will call me blessed!"



village where Tekakwitha lived. The people called them "black robes" because that is what they wore all the time. They were not soldiers and they did not come to trade things like the other white men did. They asked the chiefs if they could talk to the people about God, the Great Spirit. They said they had some good news about Him for the people to hear. They promised to be peaceful and not harm anyone, and gave some gifts to the chiefs. The chiefs agreed to let them stay awhile and build a lodge in their village. Kindness to strangers was an Indian value and they were chiefs.

The "black robes" stayed among the people and spoke often about Jesus, who as God's son, came to show people how to live in peace. He gave his life in great suffering on the cross for all people everywhere, even the Indian people who already knew about the Great Spirit. Tekakwitha heard these men speak and she felt her heart go out to them and their words. She felt they were good words for her and her people to hear. She was 12 years old and had many things that she was thinking about. She had many questions and these men were giving answers that went straight to her heart.

For the next eight years, the black robes came among her people, speaking and baptizing. She held back during that time until she felt ready to ask for baptism. She knew that it would displease her uncle and she did not want to hurt him. She respected him and owed so much to him for taking care of her all her years in his longhouse. But she finally felt that she must do what God was calling her to do. True to her name, she put God first in her life. If God was really her Father, then she must respect his wishes also. On Easter in 1676, she had the water of Baptism poured over her and became a follower of Jesus. From then on, she felt a great closeness to God. She was filled with the presence of God and his love, and talked to Him often in her prayers.

At first, her life did not look different. She still worked as hard as ever and took care of her relatives. But gradually, some of the people began to make fun of her, because

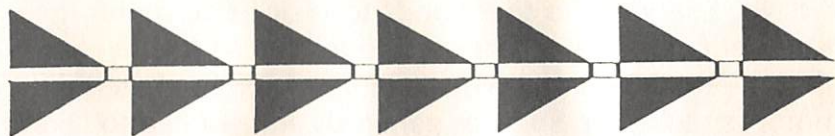
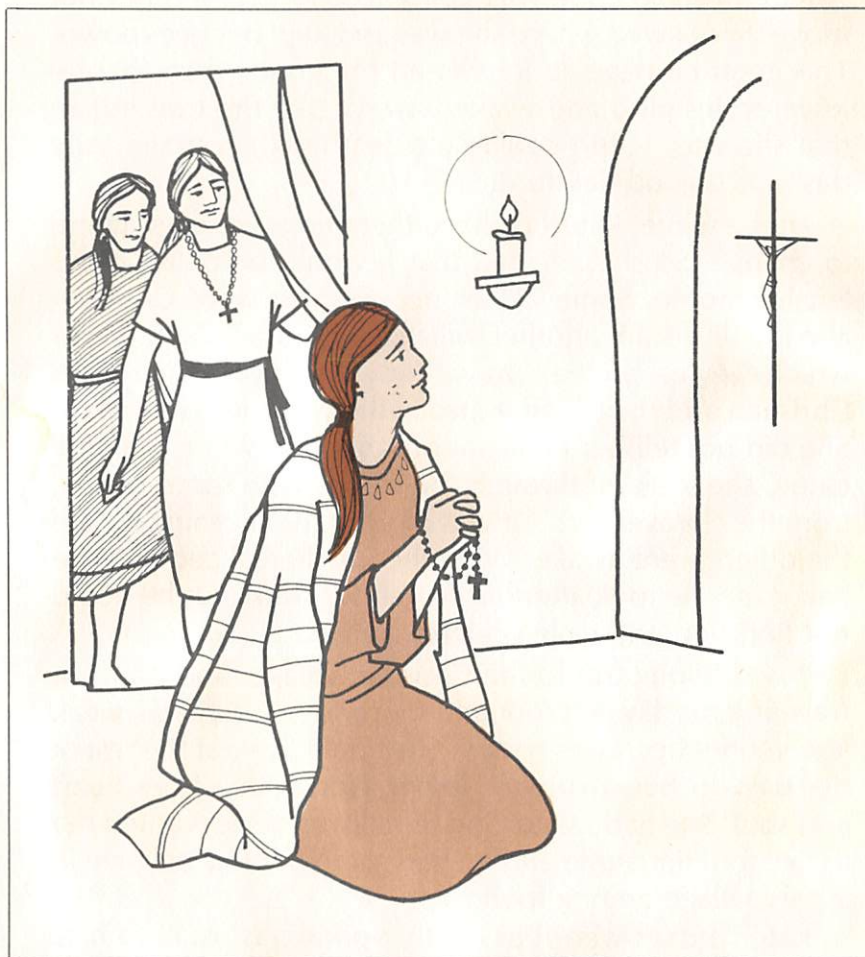
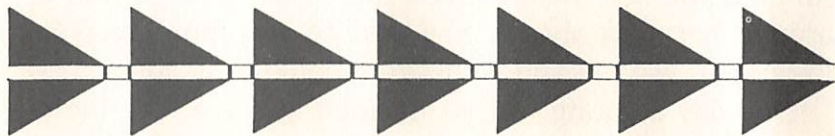
Kateri loved. It was an honor to give things to others, to make oneself poor.

Kateri was good at beading and used to make beautiful things which she gave away. Sometimes she would make something beautiful for God and put it in the chapel for Him alone. She knew that God loved praise in the Indian way.

The Great Spirit had taught Kateri many things in her heart, and she had good advice for others when they asked for it. Often they would say to her: "Kateri tell us a story," and she would. She remembered everything she was told about the life of Jesus and his followers. She would tell these stories as if it were happening. People would listen for a long time and not get bored by her. In fact, they enjoyed being with her, because they felt the presence of God. One time the "black robe" asked the people why they gathered around Kateri in church. They told him that they felt close to God when Kateri prayed. They said that her face changed when she was praying. It became full of beauty and peace, as if she were looking at God's face.

Gradually, Kateri's health grew worse and worse. Finally she had to go to bed and could not help with the work anymore. People still kept coming to her for advice and stories. They would pray with her, too, and feel the presence of God. They did not want to think that she was going to die. They would all miss her so much. She was like a mother to all of them. She never had children of her own, but everyone felt like a family around her.

Kateri was not afraid to die, just as before when the warrior tried to scare her. Instead of making her feel sad, dying made her feel good. She said that it was like "going home." Besides, she would join all the other people who had gone before her. Finally, during Holy Week when the church remembers the suffering and death of Jesus, Kateri died. It was April 17, 1680, and it was spring time. Just when mother earth is giving new life to the trees, plants and animals, God was giving new life to Kateri Tekakwitha. Kateri was young in years — just 24 years old.

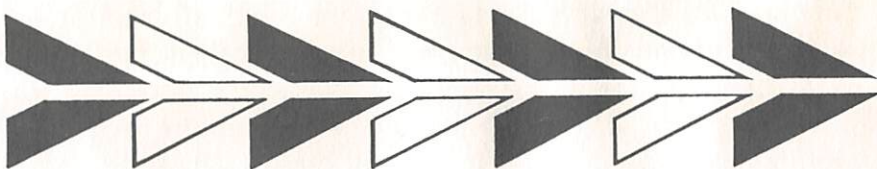
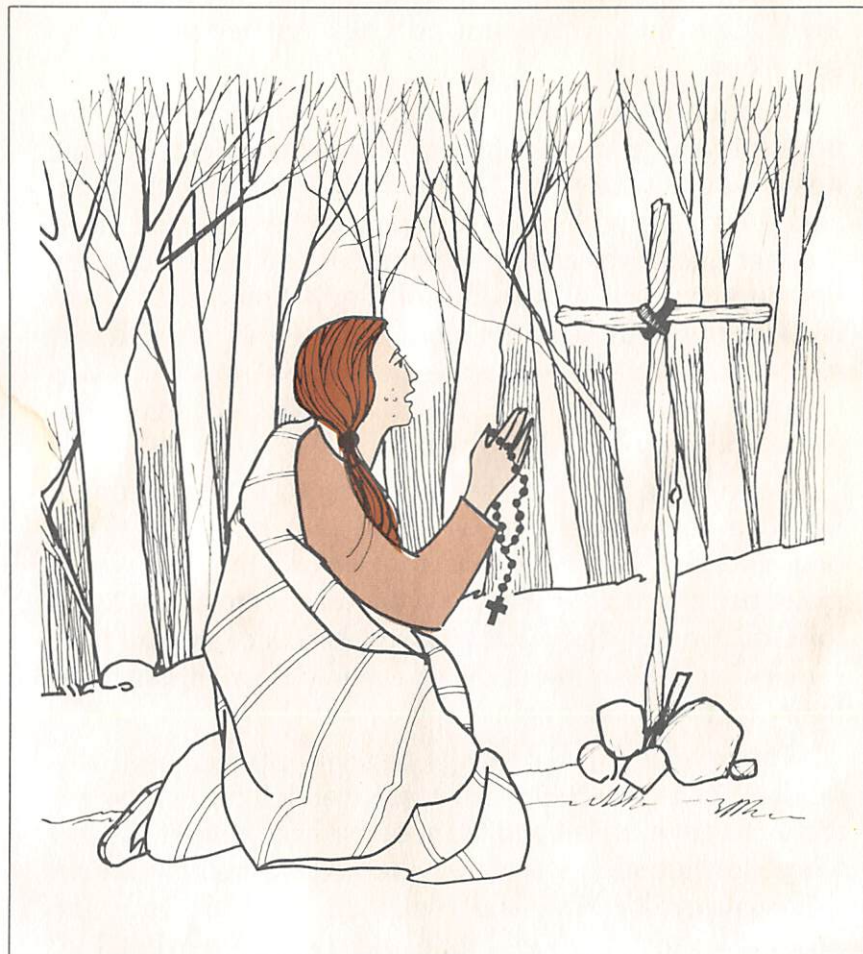
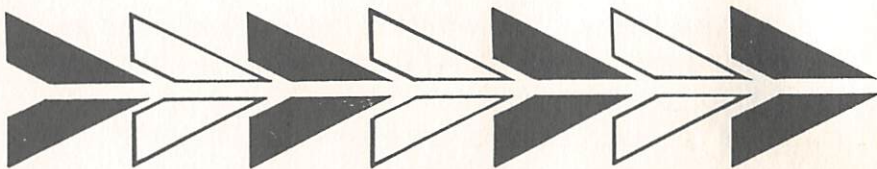


they felt that she was betraying the Indian people and going over to the whites. Kateri (her new name after Baptism) tried to tell them that God, the Great Spirit who made all people, belongs to everyone. They did not understand her and called her a "Christian dog" because she listened to the white black robes. It was a hard time for Kateri Tekakwitha but she put up with it because she loved God and would not go back on her promise to serve him.

Many times her family would say to her: "Kateri, it is time for you to have a family of your own. Your uncle needs your husband to help him now, he is getting old and you owe it to him." Kateri loved children, and knew that her uncle was getting old and needed help. But since her Baptism, she was so full of God's Spirit, that it was hard for her to think about a husband as well. She felt that all people of goodness were her family now. She was happy the way she was. Her family did not leave her alone, begging her to get married.

They would not give her anything to eat on Sundays because she would not work on that holy day. They began to give her the worst jobs thinking that this would make her give up her ideas. "Who ever heard about living for God alone?" they would say. Kateri accepted all their remarks and jobs cheerfully. She would do anything to remain loyal to God's call.

Whenever two hard things begin to push or pull at a person, this is where the cross is. Kateri felt pushed by her family to get married and fit in, but she felt pulled by God to live for him alone. Because she had learned the Indian value of loyalty well, she remained loyal to God. She loved to go to the woods alone and spend time with God. There in the tall trees and quiet sounds, He would speak to her heart. All of nature spoke to her about the Creator and she felt at peace. Being in harmony with all creation was an Indian value that she had learned early in her life and she held to it always. Because she felt the "cross" in her life, she used to make a cross of sticks in the woods and it would comfort her to think about how much Jesus



suffered for her. Kateri loved the rosary and carried it around her neck always. She used to sing the prayers in the Indian way, as she went around all the beads.

One day a young warrior decided to scare Kateri into giving up her ways. He put on his war paint, picked up a club and charged at her as if to kill her.

Kateri thought she was going to die, and she did not move. She stayed where she was and kept her eyes down. This great courage so impressed the young man that he lowered his club and walked away. Like the true Indian that she was, Kateri could face death with courage. Any day was a good day to die.

After a while, Kateri realized that things were not going to change. So she decided that it would be better if she left her home. Some of her people who were Christian already lived in another village with the black robes which they called the "prayer fort." Everybody there was Christian and they lived in peace the way they wanted to. She did not tell her family about this, and when the time came, she took off through the woods with some people from the "prayer fort." It was early in the morning before the others were awake. When her uncle realized that she had gone, he took after her to get her back, but he could not find her, and gave up after awhile.

It was a long trip to the Christian village, and it meant traveling for days on foot and by canoe. Kateri was weak and yet her heart was happy. She could live out the rest of her days in her own way: loving God with all her heart and soul. She had asked God to help her if He wanted her to live for Him alone and he had given her this new life in a new village among friends.

Kateri's days were busy with working as usual to help others. She went to work in the cornfields every day. She gathered firewood as she had always done back in her old village. She went to the woods to pick berries with the other women. The others used to tell her to take it easy, that she was too weak to do so much work, but Kateri did not listen to them. She was generous and wanted to take care of them. Generosity was an Indian value which